PRIVATE EYE

No. 1159
26 May –
8 June 2006
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CABINET BACKS NUCLEAR POWER

WHAT'S A BOUNDARY?

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Auto EXPRESS DRIVER POWER 2006
BEST MANUFACTURER: LEXUS
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Model shown RX 400h with metallic paint £36,900 OTR. RX range prices start from £36,350 to £45,765. Prices correct at time of going to press and include VAT, delivery charges, number plates, full tank of fuel, one year's road fund licence and first registration fee. BBC Top Gear Magazine Motoring Surv

RX 400h fuel economy figures: extra-urban 37.2mpg (7.6L/100km), urban 31.0mpg (9.1L/100km), combined 34.9mpg (8.1L/100km). CO_2 emissions 192g/km

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The official fuel consumption figures in mpg (l/100km) for the 2.0 VVT 135 are: Urban 25.7 (11.0), Extra Urban 46.3 (6.1), Combined 35.7 (7.9). The official CO_2 emission figure is 187g/km.

Price includes delivery to dealer, number plates, 17.5% VAT, 12 months' Government road fund licence and £38 first registration fee. Cashback is paid directly to the customer by the participating dealer. Finance is subject to status. You must be at least 18 and a UK resident (excluding the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man) to apply for finance. Finance provided by RFS Ltd, Charterhall House, Charterhall Drive, Chester CH88 3AN. All figures correct at time of going to press. This offer applies to vehicles ordered by 30th June 2006 and is available to private and small business customers at participating dealers only. Separate offers apply in Northern Ireland. Car shown with optional metallic paint £350. *EBD = Electronic Brake Distribution.

Breaking the code

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SO Tony Blair's legacy is set to be a nuclear one. And where better to announce it than in front of the well-fed suits at the CBI annual dinner?

The move should have been rumbled when the PM's reshuffle saw nuclear enthusiasts promoted and sceptics moved well away from the subject.

As the new Environment Secretary, the loyal and ambitious David Miliband can be relied on not to raise the kind of objections that his predecessor, Margaret Beckett, had already voiced. And he won't have to deal with Elliott Morley, the sacked junior Environment Minister, who responded to Blair's declaration that nuclear was back "with a vengeance" by pointing out: "The reality is that economically the risks are great and the returns are low."

Meanwhile Alistair Darling takes over at the department nominally responsible for the energy review, Trade and Industry, having recently spoken in favour of nuclear as Scottish Secretary (the part-time job he held while at transport).

Few believe the private sector will shoulder all the long-term risks of new nuclear infrastructure, while the government won't want to carry the unflattering multi-billion liabilities either. Some form of public private partnership (the PFI industry must be rubbing its hands gleefully) is thus in the offing – and the gravy train that goes with it won't have gone unnoticed in the City and Whitehall.

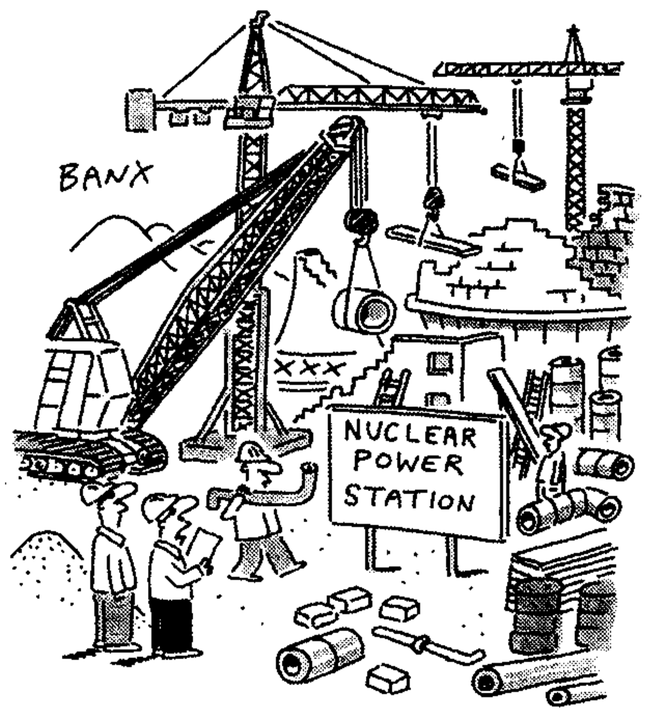
Those standing to gain already include many of Labour's friends. Engineering firm Amec counts former Energy Minister Brian Wilson among the directors of its nuclear business, while US nuclear giant Fluor has a Labour peer on its board and is a main client of the ultimate New Labour lobbyist, Sovereign Strategy.

This outfit, a regular donor to party funds, is run by David Miliband's constituency party chairman Alan Donnelly and has former cabinet minister Jack Cunningham on the board. Cunningham is also honorary chairman of the Transatlantic Nuclear Forum.

Just a few months ago the *Eye* revealed how, at a Sovereign-arranged conference, Fluor's chairman introduced star attraction Tony Blair as a man of destiny: "Albert Einstein once defined leaders as 'the bridges that connect people to the future'. That, I believe, is what the prime minister seeks to do…" Don't rule out the chances of a grateful atomic industry proving very welcoming to a statesman of such stature once the "orderly transition" is over.

ANY attempt to restart the nuclear-power programme will be fiercely opposed by a new website, nuclearspin.org, jointly funded by Greenpeace and the JMG Foundation.

Oddly, however, the "pro-nuclear individuals" named and shamed on the site include many Labour MPs but almost no Tories. Might this by any chance be related to the fact that the JMG Foundation was created by Zak Goldsmith, David Cameron's "green guru"?



"I hope we're not pre-empting the energy review"

FORGET the storm of criticism over the QinetiQ sell-off (*Eyes passim ad nauseam*). The government has ignored it and given another vote of confidence to chief executive John Chisholm.

The scandalously underpriced sale of the UK's defence labs gave a massive boost to US investment firm Carlyle, but did little for British taxpayers. Chisholm though did nicely: personally making around £20m from his stake in sale.

Science Minister Lord Sainsbury, clearly comfortable in the company of über-capitalists, has now made Chisholm head of the Medical Research Council (MRC), which doles out millions of pounds in research grants.

He said Chisholm's "experience of working with government" made him the ideal man for the job, which won't convince those who think Chisholm's real expertise is actually in ripping-off the government.

Still, apparently acknowledging that he had already got plenty from the public purse, Chisholm waived his entitlement to an honorarium for the MRC post.

WHILE computer firm EDS is messing up the payment of RAF crews' salaries thanks to its handling of the Joint Personnel Administration system (see last *Eye*), it is at least being nice to some airmen.

Air Chief Marshall Sir Anthony Bagnall was vice-chief of the defence staff until last July. This March he joined the EDS Defence Advisory Council.

SLEAZE WATCHDOG SHOCK

THERE are no hard feelings between the Revenue and the latest company to use the European courts to avoid paying millions of pounds in tax.

As lead claimant in one of the "group litigation orders" challenging British tax law, Cadbury Schweppes has recently persuaded the European Court of Justice's advocate-general that the Revenue's efforts to tax profits that the firm has for years stashed in various tax havens should be strictly limited.

So when the chancellor announced in his budget that HMRC chairman Sir David Varney would be chairing yet another review of how the department deals with big business – ensuring "that HMRC's work in respect of policy maintenance and implementation is better informed by the perspective of business" – few expected determined tax dodgers to be running the show.

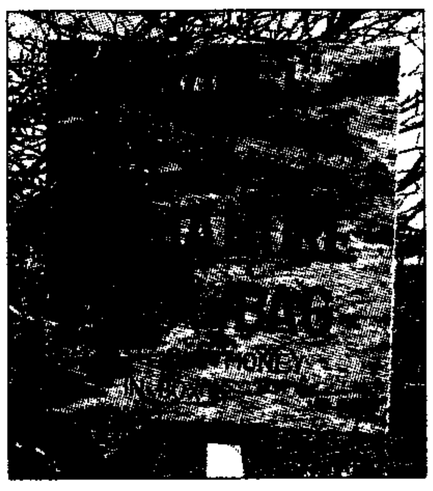
Now, however, it emerges that the select group in charge of the review will include one Ken Hanna, finance director of… Cadbury Schweppes!

ON THE day before Bono edited the *Independent*, it handed over two pages to another international icon. Peter Mandelson (for it was he) appeared in its "You Ask the Questions" slot. But it seems he may have misunderstood the feature's title.

Scores of *Indie* readers had emailed questions which were duly forwarded to the great man. There were plenty about such distasteful subjects as the Blair-Brown feud or his own chequered ministerial career, but scarcely any about his current job as a Euro-wallah. How could he write lengthy answers boasting of his heroic achievements in negotiating the Doha trade round, cutting agricultural subsidies, etc, if no one asked about these things?

Simple. He inserted some questions of his own devising in among the genuine inquiries. Sub-editors at the *Indie* then had to dream up fictitious readers' names to conceal the subterfuge.

PS: One question was: "Under what circumstances might it be legitimate for a politician to lie?" To which Mandy replied: "There are no circumstances in which it is legitimate for a politician to lie." He should know!



I-SPY

Opposite Rosslyn Chapel, near Edinburgh.

Submitted by Alan Bruce.

£10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

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ABC

NEWS FROM THE SANDPIT

THE question of the day here in Basra, at least before the World Cup begins, is: who is supplying the "insurgents" with so many rather good weapons?

One source, says Amnesty International, could be the US. Back in 2004 the Pentagon organised the shipment of 200,000 Kalashnikovs from Bosnia to Iraq to be used by the new Iraqi police. The Americans used an air freight company called Aerocom, without doing background checks that would have revealed that the company was owned by notorious arms dealer and crook, Vicktor Bout. Evidence shows that the flights took off, but Baghdad air traffic control has no record of their landing. The weapons are "missing".

The other source is, of course, Iran. The Green Slime (aka Intelligence Corps) isn't keen as yet to talk about the new Shia groups emerging in the south of Iraq, brandishing Iranian weapons; but for future reference they are the brigades of the Imam Kazim and Imam Ali and Imam Hadi, respectively.

They boast Iranian made "passive infra-red, compressed gas" roadside bombs that have already killed squaddies, including the two lads from the 2nd Battalion Royal Anglian Regiment (briefly called the Royal Anglican Regiment by idiots at the BBC). Richard Clarke, a former White House counter terrorism chief, told ABC News that "in all probability, the Iranian government is knowingly killing US troops".

Ours too. An Iranian-backed terror group run by Abu Mustafa al-Sheibani is blamed by spooks for 11 British deaths, including the two helicopter crews, one Brit, the other American, shot down by Iranian Strela missiles. Operation Persian Freedom grows closer.

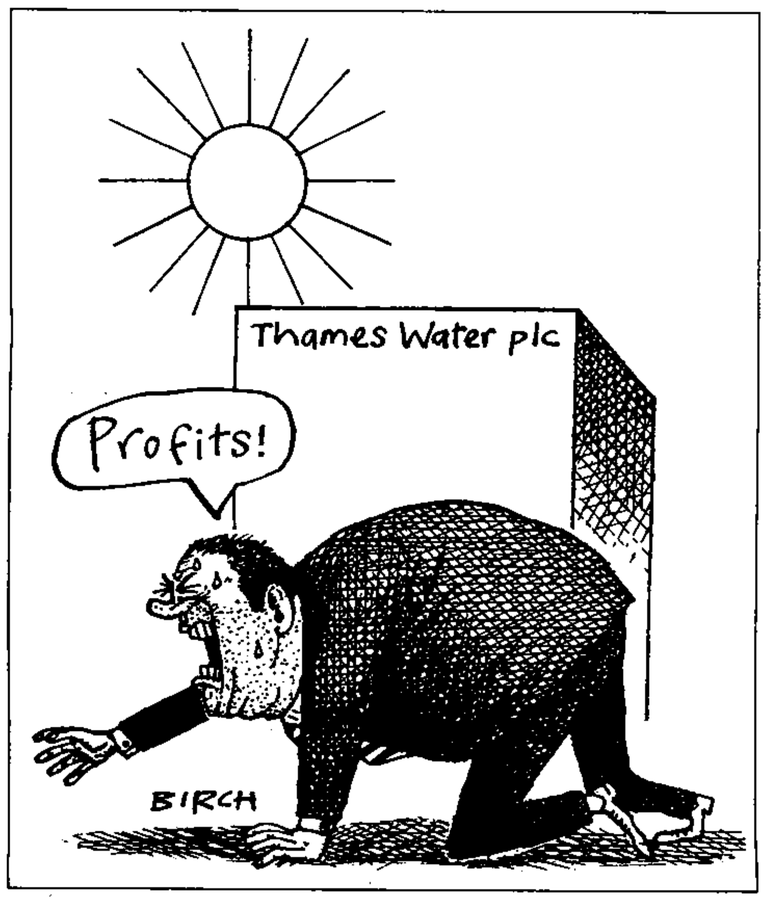
'Square Basher'

WORLD OF SPORT

JACQUES ROGGE, president of the International Olympic Committee, flew into London last week to hold a press conference with his friend Sebastian Coe – but, bizarrely, refused to answer any questions from the press.

Could the Lord of the Rings be getting a bit twitchy about the gathering scandal in Italian football, where champions Juventus have been accused of match fixing? For at the centre of the storm is Franco Carraro, one of Italy's members of the IOC, who is now facing criminal prosecution at home for his role in the affair.

Rogge has managed to ride out controversies caused by other IOC members from Korea and Bulgaria getting caught breaking the law in their own countries, but Carraro brings scandal uncomfortably close to the heart of the IOC, and to Downing Street. Last July, at the vote for the venue of the 2012 Olympics, Carraro backed London on instructions from Silvio Berlusconi, after pressure had been applied by none other than Tony Blair.



Street Of Shame

EVEN *Sunday Times* readers with strong stomachs will have flinched at the full-page story two weeks ago, complete with pictures, about the killing of al-Arabiya TV journalist Atwar Bahjat.

She and her crew were murdered on 22 February while covering a bomb-attack on the Shiite shrine at Samarra in Iraq. However, according to *Sunday Times* reporter Hala Jaber, no one but her killers knew how much she had suffered until a film of her death "emerged last week", supplied to the paper by "a source linked to the Sunni insurgency".

The worst fears of what might have happened "have been far exceeded by the reality", Jaber revealed. Although it was reported at the time that Bahjat had been shot dead, "we now know that it was not that swift". There followed an exceedingly detailed account of how she was half-stripped ("doubly humiliating for a Muslim woman") and then filmed in a state of mortal terror before being beheaded. "There is a wider significance to the appalling footage and the accompanying details. The film appears to show for the first time an Iraqi death squad in action."

But it doesn't show the death of Atwar Bahjat. The day after the *Sunday Times* story, a colleague from al-Arabiya appeared on the channel to point out that "the woman shown in the video was not her and does not even resemble her". Besides, wire photos taken after her corpse was recovered for burial show her head clearly still attached to her body (which, incidentally, was fully clothed).

The images in the *Sunday Times* have been floating around the ghastlier corners of the internet for almost two years. They show the beheading of one of 12 Nepalese workers who were kidnapped and executed by Ansar al-Sunnah in the summer of 2004.

The paper has been the victim of a grotesque hoax. It seems odd that Jaber, who knew Bahjat, failed to spot the discrepancies. Odd, too, that the *Sunday Times* still hasn't printed a follow-up setting the record straight.

REPORTING the whole life sentence given to John McGrady for the rape, murder and mutilation of 15-year-old Rochelle Holness, the *Sun* was impressed by the response of her family.

"Rochelle's family yesterday demanded greater supervision of sex offenders on their release," the paper noted. "A statement from her relatives after the case also said: 'The sentence is a just reflection of the heinous crime. We trust life does mean life.'"

Curiously, the paper omitted the rest of the statement read out by the Holness family's lawyer Andre Clovis, which pointed out that "we have been deeply shocked by the timing of the cruel, sensationalist reporting by some of the tabloid press. We hope that those responsible for causing us so much unnecessary pain will today feel the shame that has so far been absent, for their behaviour has been as inhumane as John McGrady's."

The reporting in question? A 400-word piece in the *Sun* last 1 October by Mike Sullivan, Alex Peake and Tony Bonnici which began "KIDNAPPED schoolgirl Rochelle Holness was cut up with an electric saw while she was STILL ALIVE, it was revealed last night. Blood splattered ceilings and walls in the kitchen of the flat where she was butchered indicate the 15-year-old was strapped to a table and dismembered as her heart was still beating" – a claim which turned out to be entirely untrue.

"It's to cover up the smell of crisps"

FROM the *Sun* comes the bizarre suggestion that David Blunkett should be our next ambassador to Washington.

The article was penned by Chris Buckland, a jobbing hack who also happens to be Blunkett's ghost-writer. Did the ex-Home Secretary himself perhaps "float" the idea?

Going to America would certainly save Blunkett the discomfort of being left to languish on the backbenches if Gordon Brown becomes prime minister. And Blunkett, sometime romancer of Kimberly Fortier and Heidi Kingstone, has a thing about north American women and their accents. Watch out, Barbara Bush!

THE gratuitous plugs in the *Sun* for Ross Kemp, husband of editor Rebekah Wade, continue – though less often since his pisspoor series *Ultimate Force* was quietly dropped from the schedules, a week after the paper had lauded him as "one of ITV's favourite faces".

Admirable as the efforts of TV previewer Anila Baig are, however, it might be an idea for her to occasionally watch the programmes in question.

On 15 May she noted that "*EastEnders*' babe magnet Grant (Ross Kemp) has been attracting women left, right and centre - and Ruby's the latest to fall under his spell. But the one true love of his life, Courtney, finally gets some attention tonight. Will they admit their feelings for each other?"

As any *EastEnders* fan kno, Courtney is Grant's nine-year-old daughter. Clear the front page: "PERV SHOCK IN ALBERT SQUARE"!

SUE CARROLL was awestruck at the "compassion" shown by Coleen McLoughlin in an ITV film about her sister. "I trust her 'shopaholic airhead' label has been banished forever," she thundered in last Wednesday's *Mirror*.

Who stuck this cruel label on Coleen in the first place? Carroll didn't say, but here are a few clues:

"Services to Shopping Award: Coleen McLoughlin, who with boyfriend Wayne Rooney has reportedly blown £4 million in a year – including £80,000 on bling, £90,000 on exotic holidays and an estimated £25,000 on clothes, with £15,000 on one shopping trip to New York. Unfortunately, the dragged-through-a-hedge-backwards look has yet to catch on." – Sue Carroll, *Daily Mirror*, 29 December 2004.

"Nineteen-year-old Coleen is a girl not just addicted to shopping but, with a rapaciousness that knows no bounds, has turned it into a career." – Sue Carroll, *Daily Mirror*, 13 April 2005.

"Wayne Rooney's girlfriend Coleen has been invited on to the hour-long daytime television show *Loose Women* because she will bring 'lots of fascinating anecdotes'. Great. So how do they plan to fill the other 59 minutes?" – Sue Carroll, *Daily Mirror*, 25 January 2006.

"THERE is something particularly unpleasant about businessmen who prey on those with no money," announced the *Sunday Mirror* in its editorial on 12 February.

"One such is Guy Hands, believed to be worth pounds £175m. He owns a company called BrightHouse which specialises in selling furniture, white goods, stereos and computers to low income families struggling to make ends meet. They charge sky high prices, heavy lending rates, then hard-sell extra finance and service agreements. You can end up paying £1,168.44 for a washing machine that costs £384.99 down the road… The most vulnerable in society are all too often the most exploited."

The Mirror group, which last week announced a 12 percent drop in advertising revenue, is nothing if not vulnerable. Thus it was that on 26 April, cash-strapped readers of the *Daily Mirror* were offered a quarter-page, front-of-the-book invitation to "pay weekly, with no deposit whatever your credit history… the affordable way to furnish your home" with, yes, BrightHouse!

"MY Secret Passion – Jeanette Winterson reveals her love for Glyndebourne," was the cover story in the *Indie* arts supplement last Friday.

Winterson provided an ecstatic summary of this season's Glyndebourne offerings, including Deborah Warner's production of *Fidelio*, one of Winterson's "hot buys of the season… directed here by Deborah Warner, hitting the bull's eye as usual…[it] offers what we have come to expect from a director who excavates the music to arrive at the truth."

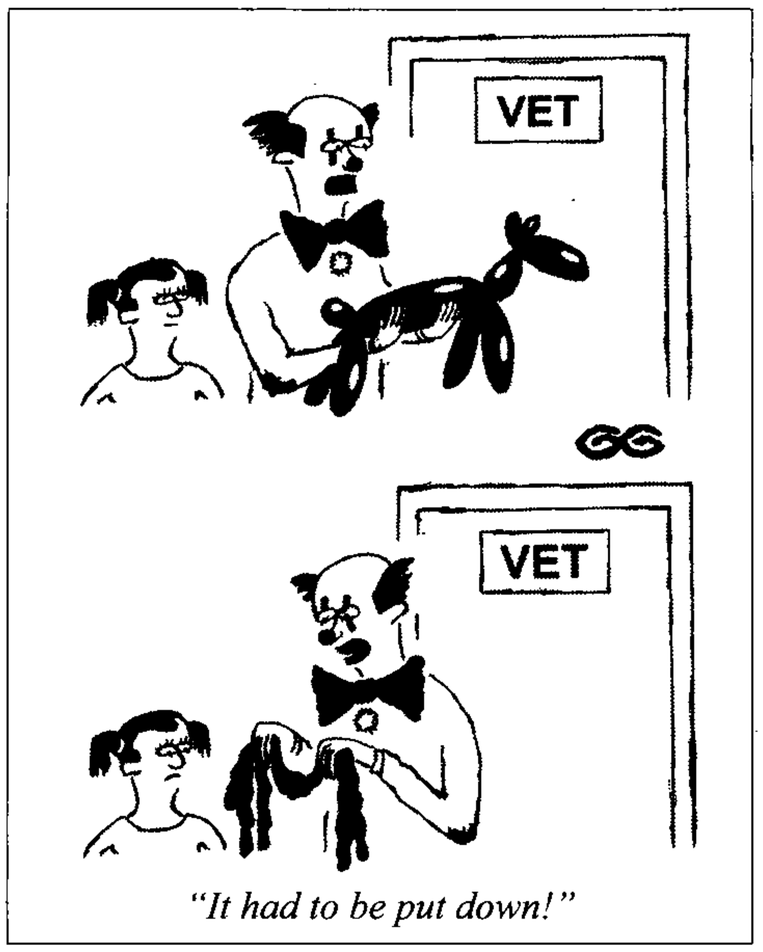
A secret passion indeed. Who is the dedicatee of Winterson's books *Weight* and *Lighthousekeeping*, the director who staged her *PowerBook* and the devoted partner who accompanied Jeanette when she collected an OBE from Prince Charles earlier this year? Step forward… Deborah Warner.

"They've merged nice cop and nasty cop"

THE *Daily Mail* offered a masterclass in how to get two stories for the price of one on the day of the FA Cup final, when it reunited former cup winners Ian Rush and Alan Taylor in the unfinished Wembley Stadium to reminisce about their respective wins. Rush and Taylor posed for a photograph high in the stands, both wearing building site safety gear. "Striking View" was the headline on page 107.

Meanwhile on page 19, Paul Harris bemoaned the fact Wembley was "a sorry site" on the day it was supposed to have reopened, beneath an enormous shot of the unfinished stadium. "Why we're not on the way to Wembley: Instead of 90,000 fans, just two workers in the stands", the caption ran.

Curiously, the two workers in the picture – which was shot from exactly the same angle as that on page 107, with every crane, lorry and JCB in an identical position – appeared to be wearing exactly the same outfits as Rush and Taylor beneath their hardhats and reflective jackets. What an astonishing coincidence!



"It had to be put down!"

"BEING ruled by Scots is no joke for the English majority," thundered ginger whinger Simon Heffer in the *Telegraph* last Wednesday, pointing out that "the Scots are an over-represented and increasingly unaccountable minority" in British politics.

As if demonstrating his point, his piece was flanked on the comment page by columns by Glaswegians Andrew O'Hagan and Andrew Marr, in an edition whose front page was dominated by a vast plug for football columnist (and Clackmannanshire native) Alan Hansen.

Perhaps Heffer should have a word with his boss, *Telegraph* chief executive Murdoch McLennan…

THE *Times* seized upon *Marketing* magazine's customer survey of Britain's most hated brands with glee.

"What's the thing we most love to hate? Why, it's Pot Noodles," chortled Alan Hamilton. "We also detest, in descending order, the QVC shopping channel, Sainsbury's Novon washing powder and McDonald's."

Curiously, although he devoted 400 words to the topic, Hamilton was unable to find room to record a couple of other brands which scored highly in the "most hated" ratings: at number 10, *The Sun*, and at 13, Sky Sports, both owned by the Times' parent company, News International.

THE Glenfiddich Food and Drink Awards are advertised as the "foodie Oscars" by the sponsors, and just like the Oscars they are in fact a riot of back-scratching and score-settling. This year was no exception.

There was surprise that the book-category shortlist omitted Rose Prince's acclaimed *New English Kitchen* and Nigel Slater's *Kitchen Diaries*, considered by many to be his finest work. Both are published by Fourth Estate – the selfsame publisher which turned down a proposal by one of this year's judges, Sybil Kapoor of the *Sunday Times*.

Happily, the two events are wholly unrelated; as is the award of the photography prize to Patrice de Villiers. The words her pictures illustrate, which appear in the *Sunday Times* Style magazine, are written by… Sybil Kapoor. Trebles all round!

FORGET the Beckhams' world cup bash. There was only one party to be seen at this month: the 10th anniversary celebration for *OK!* magazine (prop: Richard Desmond), which the *Daily Express* (prop: Richard Desmond) reported was "celebrated by a host of stars, VIPs and movers and shakers at a glittering party in London".

Oh yeah? According to the paper, "among those toasting a decade of celebrity exclusives were model Jordan and husband Peter Andre, former Tory leader Michael Howard, Barbara Windsor and Gloria Hunniford".

GRAUNIAD SPECIAL

DR Chris Malyszewicz, the man who provided the lab tests for most of last year's undercover discoveries of hospital superbug MRSA on payphones and "mops of death" in hospitals, was roundly discredited by the *Guardian*'s Bad Science column and Radio 4's *You and Yours*, which noted how his unaccredited garden shed laboratory produced so many positive MRSA results for tabloid hacks.

Dr Malyszewicz runs a business called Chemsol Group which, among other things, sells "the perfect gift for a friend or relative in hospital". You can even "show them how much you care for their health by giving a Combact Antimicrobial Hospital Pack" (aka expensive soap) offering "immediate protection against MRSA and Hospital Acquired Infections".

Following an official investigation, Lord Warner told the House of Lords that the good doctor is "not qualified in microbiology, is not a member of a recognised professional body" and his "so-called laboratory does not meet UK accreditation standards".

Indeed, when Dr Malyszewicz eventually released 10 samples in which he claimed to have found MRSA to the Health Protection Agency, detailed forensic microbiology testing found traces of the bacteria on just two of them. While real experts acknowledge that MRSA is a serious problem, they say that such flawed results could mean resources are targeted at the wrong areas.

Over at the *Graun*'s sister paper, however, who on 14 May was advising *Observer* readers to "Ask family to wear masks and maybe disinfect the area around the bed" while name-checking his hospital packs in the *Ask the Experts* column? Yes, "expert in MRSA infections and disinfection procedures", Dr Christopher Malyszewicz.

THE university league tables published in the Education *Guardian* earlier this month were a classic of Farringdon Road accuracy.

On learning that it was 7th from the bottom of the league, the University of Bolton was more baffled than bothered, telling its local paper that the tables, which were broken down by subject, must be wrong since they did "not correlate with what the university actually teaches".

But Coventry University challenged its placing and, as a result, moved from 111th place up to a proud 63rd. When the revised table was produced, Coventry's position was also improved in 12 different subjects. The university said the *Grauniad* admitted it had had problems with the original analysis.

Despite the big noise the paper made about the league tables' publication and their importance to universities in attracting new students, the *Guardian*'s only effort to put things right was a small mention in 19 May's Corrections & Clarifications: "The *Guardian*'s university tables have undergone a degree of revision since they were first published and a number of universities have shifted position – including Stirling, Edinburgh, Bolton, and Coventry."

IN A burst of *Independent*-style nature worship, the *Guardian* branched out in a new direction last week, giving away free daily wallcharts about the birds and the bees.

The charts identified all the sharks, garden birds, butterflies, fungi and sea fish that readers might run into the way back from the newsagents. Reassuringly, traditional standards of accuracy were maintained.

The paper got the name of one shark and the size of another completely wrong; it identified several moths as butterflies; suggested readers look out for a number of extinct birds in British gardens and recommended eating the giant funnel-cap mushroom which is toxic to some people.

Unashamed, the *Grauniad* then hit upon a daring way to apologise for the last mistake: readers were offered the opportunity to try their luck by entering a draw for a "a packet of free wild mushrooms".

EVER since the Dear Leader moved into No 10, his devotees have been looking for someone to prevent Gordon Brown succeeding him. Various possible messiahs have come and gone – Alan Milburn, Jack Straw, David Blunkett, Charles Clarke. It's a measure of just how few diehard Blairites remain that the new "stop Gordon" figurehead is the bullet-headed bruiser John Reid.

Sorry, *Doctor* John Reid. As soon as he was elected to the House in 1987 he requested the parliamentary authorities always to address him with full postgraduate dignity. An odd vanity, since his Ph.D thesis – a Marxist treatise on the economic history of west Africa – is a monument to his Stalinist past, which he claims to have put behind him.

He's a man of many exes – ex-Communist, ex-smoker and (like Alastair Campbell) ex-alcoholic. As the *Eye* reported in 1992: "Reid is frequently tired and emotional and finds difficulty avoiding controversial physical entanglements." He thumped a doorkeeper at the division lobby for barring his entry after the bell had sounded for the end of the division, and punched fellow Labour MP Gerry Bermingham in Annie's Bar.

In 1994 Reid heeded the advice of John Smith that he'd never be promoted unless he gave up the booze. But his belligerence, which he claims was brought on by too many whisky chasers, was a harder habit to kick. At the 1999 Labour conference Reid had a heated, finger-jabbing confrontation with Scottish first minister Donald Dewar which ended only when Tony Blair arrived to separate the combatants.

This occurred just after Reid's son Kevin, who worked for Scottish political lobbyists Beattie Media, was exposed by the *Observer* boasting to a potential client (actually an undercover reporter), that "I know the secretary of state [for Scotland] very, very well, because he's my father". Dewar asked the Scottish parliament's standards committee to investigate – much to the fury of Kevin's dad, who insisted this was quite unnecessary since his son was clearly blameless.

His distaste for sleaze inquiries was confirmed the following year when Westminster standards commissioner Elizabeth Filkin looked into claims that Reid had used his parliamentary allowance to pay Kevin to work full-time on Labour's Scottish election campaign – a clear breach of the rule that MPs' office expenses "must be incurred wholly, exclusively and necessarily in the performance of parliamentary duties".

Reid threatened potential witnesses with dire consequences if they cooperated with Filkin. The party's general-secretary in Scotland, Alex Rowley, was warned that he'd never be endorsed as a parliamentary candidate if he told the truth. Other party officials were put under "immense pressure".

Filkin found Reid guilty of misusing his parliamentary allowance, interfering with a key witness and generally seeking to "frustrate my investigations" – a damning verdict on a serving cabinet minister. But the Labour-dominated standards and privileges committee rode to the rescue, deciding to reject her conclusions and bring in a "not proven" verdict instead (though even it had to concede that his conduct had been "at best unwise"). Elizabeth Filkin was forced out of her job soon afterwards.

For all his philosophical pretensions, such as his frequent allusions to Hegel and Gramsci, Reid is essentially a politburo thug of the old school. Hence his friendship in the 1990s with the Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic and General Ratko Mladic, the butcher of Srebrenica. In 1993, during his drinking days, he spent three days as Karadzic's guest at a luxury hotel in Geneva – a freebie he forgot to declare in the register of members' interests.

"The one thing I've never been accused of is diplomacy," Reid admitted to a Scottish interviewer recently. "My favourite definition of diplomacy is from an American senator who said that diplomacy is the art of saying 'Good dog… good dog' until you find a big enough rock." He then mimed bashing a dog with a rock.

It seems bizarre that this old Stalinist is now being touted as the best hope of safeguarding the Blairites' "modernising programme" against Gordon Brown. But his leadership aspirations could yet be scuppered even before Blair departs: if Karadzic and Mladic are arrested in the next year or so and brought to trial at the Hague on war-crimes charges, one of the first character witnesses they call will probably be Dr John Reid.

CALLED TO ORDURE

WESTMINSTER can't get over the pisspoor performance of Cabinet Secretary Sir Gus O'Donnell in front of the Commons Public Administration Committee.

When he took over from the little-regarded Andrew Turnbull last year, he was hailed as an unstuffy new force for good. But his answers last week were so gutless, MPs now suspect the civil service crisis is even worse than feared.

O'Donnell made a rare appearance in front of the committee to discuss ethics and standards. This included cash-for-peerages, *l'affaire Prescott* and the numerous cock-ups at the Home Office. Tricky. Yet the top civil servant in the land should be able to overcome a few obstacles… Shouldn't he?

O'Donnell's face was a model of serenity as he eased himself into his seat. But he then delivered a long, cliché-clogged preamble which only made the MPs bored and angry.

A self-admiring passage about "strategic HR" (or personnel as it used to be called) was typical. He also announced that he was organising a conference called "21st century government – putting people first". Committee chairman Tony Wright retorted: "You'd hardly run a conference called 'putting people last', would you?" O'Donnell winced and things went downhill from there.

O'Donnell's first mention of the Home Office was to remark that it was "a department that faces a large number of challenges". This may have been standard Whitehall euphemism for "the place is a total shambles" but it soon became clear O'Donnell actually believed the system was working well!

Why had no official been sacked for the bungling which forced Charles Clarke out of office? O'Donnell went into a five-minute spiel of jargon-packed waffle, oblivious to the groans and sighs of the committee.

When chairman Wright pointed out that there was no mechanism for an inquiry into the missing foreign criminals scandal, O'Donnell could only point to the "capability reviews" he had set up, one of which will be "looking at the capability of the Home Office". (These reviews are being run by the head of the prime minister's delivery unit, Ian Watmore, a former Accenture consultant responsible for the disastrous National Insurance record system. So that's all right, then.)

A few more minutes of chunter tested patience even further. Wright said curtly that the Home Office was "seriously dysfunctional" and had "screwed up". He asked: "Who has carried the can for this, apart from the Minister?" O'Donnell robotically told him that "there are a number of officials doing a wide range of jobs" and said it was a "complex issue".

Paul Flynn (Lab) expressed despair at O'Donnell's "verbal ectoplasm" and his reluctance to say how many officials had been sacked. "Is the word that you are searching for 'none'?" asked Flynn. "Will you say 'yes' or 'no'?" O'Donnell would do no such thing.

The only time O'Donnell became remotely animated was when Flynn claimed that mandarins "lick ministers' boots" to improve their career prospects. O'Donnell crossly replied: "I resent the fact that you imply my progress has been because I have never challenged anyone." But there was little evidence of him ever having stood up to authority.

At one point O'Donnell claimed that the Immigration and Nationality Directorate was doing "incredibly well". Alas, even while he was praising the IND, one of its top officials, Dave Roberts, was telling another Commons committee a few doors away that he didn't have "the faintest idea" how many illegal immigrants are at large.

O'Donnell had started the session by saying he had tightened the rules on civil servants publishing kiss-and-tells and that mandarins must now sign away their copyright to any memoirs. He boasted: "I was very pleased to sign it myself – so the pension's gone!"

Given his spineless performance, it's unlikely he would ever have written a book anyone would have wanted to read.

'Gavel Basher'

IS Gordon Brown indignant that John Prescott retains a full ministerial salary and perks despite relinquishing all his departmental responsibilities?

The question is easily answered. Brown made his view of such arrangements abundantly clear back in November 1997 when he launched a sudden attack on Sir Robert Clarke, executive chairman of Thames Water.

The chancellor was "greatly angered" to learn that although Clarke was handing over some of his responsibilities to a new chief executive, in preparation for his retirement two years later, he wasn't taking a commensurate cut in salary.

Insisting that he wouldn't tolerate a "new round of boardroom irresponsibility", Brown declared: "This sort of affair sends out the worst possible signal when hard decisions have to be made across every sector."

So, unless his views have changed in the intervening years, that's what he thinks of Prezza too.

Three animal rights extremists involved in the theft of the body of an elderly woman from her grave were yesterday jailed for 12 years each in what is seen by police and prosecutors as a ground-breaking case.

Grauniad

Number crunching

1,000

■ Criminals allowed to go free instead of being deported by Home Office

3,000

■ Innocent people identified as having criminal records by Home Office

THE chancellor's recent finance bill finally set out the rules for his long-promised US-inspired "real estate investment trusts", a form of tax-free property investment company. Now he is nervously waiting to see how many property companies sign up to the fancy new structure.

One that was ideally placed to do so was the *Eye's* favourite, Mapeley. But now the firm, which bought HM Revenue and Customs' "real estate" five years ago through a tax haven company, has announced that it won't be joining in the new initiative. Mapeley cheerfully admitted it has no need for the tax-free status because… it doesn't pay anyway. There's gratitude for you!

PS: Mapeley this month reported even higher profits for the start of 2006, largely on the back of the HMRC contract it promised parliament wouldn't earn it anything for 20 years. Meanwhile the government continues to pay hundreds of millions more than the deal was supposed to cost. And the estate Mapeley bought from the taxpayer for £370m five years ago is now worth £579m – a handy £209m gain on what would have been public assets, salted away tax-free in Bermuda. But still parliament refuses to reconsider what in 2003 the National Audit Office laughably called a "good deal".

WITHER Lord "Blue Skies" Birt, late of Number Ten, where he advised Tony Blair on a variety of issues from crime to health to transport to drugs?

According to an announcement in the Waste Recycling Group Ltd's spring magazine, its new chairman is none other than the arch Blair crony himself. Lord Dalek apparently took up his new role at the waste giant, a subsidiary of private equity group Terra Firma, in January, barely a month after leaving the prime minister's employ – itself a neat example of rapid recycling.

Because Birt's role was always shrouded in secrecy (Downing Street argued that to disclose his work would undermine the function of government), some of his "blue sky" reports and duties were only revealed after hacks and pressure groups used the Freedom of Information Act to get at them.

What will probably never be known is whether his discussions ever turned to waste [*sic*]. But during the time he was at Downing Street, the government backed plans to increase incinerator waste from 10 percent to 25 percent over the next few years. No doubt this pleased his new bosses at Waste Recycling, which has an interest in incinerators.

The advisory committee on business appointments approved the move, so long as Lord Birt was not personally involved in any lobbying on behalf of his new employer or their clients.

A COPY of the Hutton report autographed by Alastair Campbell and Cherie Blair fetched £400 at a New Labour fund-raising auction last week, hosted by Pensions Minister James Purnell.

Quite a bargain: the absurd ad-man Trevor Beattie paid no less than £10,000 for a Hutton report signed by Campbell at a charity auction two years ago.

But even some Blairites at last week's event could be heard questioning the tastefulness of this stunt given that the Hutton inquiry concerned the suicide of Dr David Kelly. What next for auction? Forensic photographs of the bullet-shattered corpse of Jean Charles de Menezes autographed by David Blunkett and Sir Ian Blair?

Ballack has asked Simone, 28, to marry him but it is purely lack of time, he says, which has delayed any date. His personal website reveals only that he likes nothing better than to relax with his children or to play a round of gold — handicap 22 for the record.

Evening Standard

A FORMER Conservative party fundraiser is among the latest batch of "non-party political peers" to join the House of Lords.

The Lords appointments commission describes David Rowe-Beddoe as a "leading international businessman" who will sit as a crossbencher. However, the same Rowe-Beddoe was chairman of the Monte Carlo branch of Conservatives Abroad in the 1990s. How much more non-party political can you get?

As we pointed out at the time (*Eye* 946), Labour MPs like Peter Hain once objected when John Redwood put his fellow Tory Rowe-Beddoe in charge of the Welsh Development Agency. Labourites were even crosser about revelations that Rowe-Beddoe had business links to other Tories – like party treasurer Robert McAlpine, with whom he served on the board of a property company.

When New Labour came to power, however, the party warmed to Mr Rowe-Beddoe, who was given more Welsh quango appointments. Now it seems the mutual admiration has reached such a pitch that Labour has lost its resistance altogether, while the man himself has abandoned the Tories for the crossbenches.

The appointments commission tells the *Eye* that "party activity is not a bar to being a non-party political peer, but they would have to satisfy the committee they can operate outside a party political framework". Non-political peers are not put forward by the main parties but are "nominated by someone else or by themselves".

NORTHERN Ireland officials have received yet another pasting from the Commons Public Accounts Committee (PAC) after a funding scandal.

Emerging Business Trust (EBT) was set up to provide loans to firms in disadvantaged areas, but a quarter of its money went in management fees to an accountancy practice.

By a fortunate coincidence, the accountancy outfit was run by Teresa Townsley, a board member of EBT. She was also deputy chair of Government jobs agency Ledu, one of EBT's main funders!

EBT also invested in 10 companies, two of which were connected to Mrs Townsley's husband, Michael. MPs on the PAC concluded: "This is one of the worst cases of conflict of interest and impropriety that this committee has seen."

The new permanent secretary of the Department of Enterprise that oversaw the shambles, Stephen Quinn, had only moved into his post six weeks before the PAC hearing, so he didn't get a bollocking. But committee chairman Edward Leigh MP wanted to know what had happened to his predecessors, Bruce Robinson and Sir Gerry Loughran.

He was told that Sir Gerry had become head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service while Robinson is now permanent secretary at another department. "So nobody has suffered any damage to their careers as a result of this?" asked Leigh acidly.

OBBN

THE *Eye*'s Order of the Backbench Brown Nose – inaugurated in 1998 to recognise the most "fawning, obsequious, softball, well rehearsed and planted questions" hurled towards the frontbench by "new" Labour's brightest – has been dusted down for this magnificent example from Anne Snelgrove (South Swindon), offered up to John Prescott on his first visit to the despatch box since his recent demotion.

"My right hon. Friend will know that many in the Labour party and the country are very proud of the role that he has played as Deputy Prime Minister… As I was saying, there is a great deal of pride in the party and the country about the role that the Deputy Prime Minister has played. In particular, we are pleased to hear that his responsibilities have now been defined. Perhaps he could tell us how many of his staff will be responsible for the extended responsibilities that he is taking on."

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

THERE are fewer than 400 fluent Cornish speakers, according to the Cornish Language Fellowship, all of whom speak English as well. But £600,000 of taxpayers' money – half of which comes from Cornwall's European Objective One fund – is being spent on a strategy to increase the use of the language in public life. A Cornish language officer was appointed in April.

The local Objective One Partnership is doing its bit by planning to make its website bilingual "once a consensus has been formed" on which of the three possible systems for writing the language it will use. Argument on that score has been raging for decades, and while the funding has raised the stakes, and much energy is being put into a new campaign for a standard written form of Cornish, no consensus has yet emerged – so the money can't even be spent on bilingual signs and forms without offending two thirds of that handful of Cornish speakers.

EU-phemisms

The French legislation restricting British beef imports, however, remains

CHAGOS ISLANDS

TONY BLAIR may be a little too keen to deport foreign prisoners right now, but one group of non-criminal foreigners is desperately hoping the government will let them go home.

Earlier this month two high court judges ruled that the orders in council preventing the 4,000 Chagos islanders from returning home (*Eyes passim*) were "repugnant" and illegal. The court had previously ruled in the islanders' favour in 2000, but in 2004 the then Foreign Secretary Jack Straw used orders made under royal prerogative to stop their return to the British-held islands in the Indian Ocean, the largest of which – Diego Garcia – is let to the Americans as a navy and air base. The islanders were forced out in the 1960s to make way for the base, and were abandoned, homeless and jobless, in Mauritius.

Celebration may be premature, as the Foreign Office still has time to appeal the verdict, and even if that hurdle is cleared, the US has made it clear it does not want a local population on the archipelago, claiming it will make the base vulnerable to terrorist attack.

As the US has right of veto over residence until the lease of its base runs out in 2016 (with an option to extend for another 20 years), the Chagossians still have a fight on their hands. And the US courts are not so willing to overturn their government's actions in this case. In April a federal appeals court in the US concluded that it was powerless to grant compensation to the islanders, because it would be "meddling in foreign affairs".

JUST FANCY THAT

PATSY O'DONNELL, 74, died in Londonderry last week, 34 years after being shot by paratroopers on Bloody Sunday

It was also five years since he had given evidence to Lord Saville's inquiry into events on that day, where the counsel for the soldiers accepted that Mr O'Donnell had done nothing to provoke his shooting. He is the fifth of the 14 men who were wounded by gunfire to pass away.

It remains, according to Lord Saville, "not possible at this stage to give any firm estimate of when the report is likely to be finished."

TV EYE

The Prince of Wales: Up Close (ITV1)

AT the time of the programmes marking the 80th birthday of the Queen, this column warned that, after years of losing in their struggles with the media following the Charles-Dimbleby and Diana-Bashir conversations, Buck House and Clarence House had retaliated by using access to private family footage to secure favourable profiles. This raised the risk of royal coverage slipping back 25 years to the days when Sir Arselicker Burnet and others purred at the Queen Mother's blooms.

Now, with **The Prince of Wales: Up Close**, it turns out that a quarter of a century was an optimistic estimate. This show returns Windsor-watching almost to Coronation levels. Sir Trevor McDonald, so prostrate with reverence that he is presumably dreaming of upgrading the knighthood to a peerage, is granted an audience by Charles in which all the questions relate to the Prince's Trust charity.

In the same way that his mother used the royal family cine films as a bargaining chip to keep the octogenarian docs on-side, Chuck has bargained his own availability and backstage shots of Camilla, William and Harry in exchange for soft interviewing and a celebratory tone. Simply be refusing to cooperate with the media since the Dimbleby adultery interview and the subsequent pro-Diana coverage, Clarence House has managed to make broadcasters grateful even for these pathetic scraps. The stance of the programme can be judged by the fact that Diana was never mentioned, even though she featured in some of the archive film.

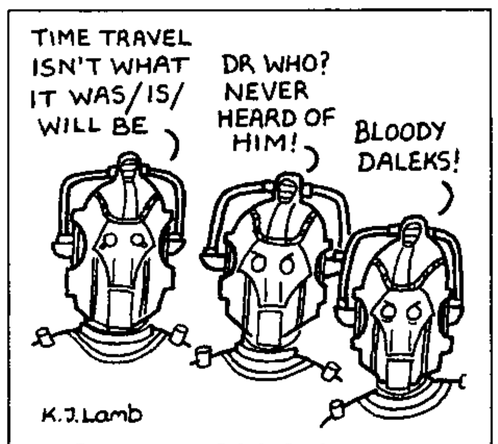
Ironically, given that the theme of the film is that he has become a sort of unofficial opposition to whichever party is in power, the rules of television would simply not permit an actual opposition politician to be profiled in so one-sided a way in anything except a party election broadcast. Indeed, the film most resembles a party political broadcast for the prince party, in which celebs – Gwynnie Paltrow, Brillo Neil, Jon Snow – pop up to say what a smart and dedicated person the party leader is.

But, though annoyingly old-fashioned in its sycophantic attitude to monarchy, the programme is irritatingly modish in the way that it's made. At some points, the prince speaks to an unseen producer but at others he is being formally interviewed by Sir Trev. In the most bewildering segment, Chuck tells the eavesdropping camera that he is going off to give an interview to Sir Trevor Macdonald, as if that conversation were part of a completely separate programme.

In another odd crossover between styles, the observational documentary watches as a quivering Sir Trev arrives for the interview and is shown the Clarence House art collection accumulated by the Queen Mum. There follows a hilarious exercise in forelock-tugging, in which McDonald's ingratiating tactic is simply to anticipate the end of the prince's sentences and get in first.

Getting such interjections is relatively easy because of the many pauses in Charles's notoriously tortured speech. "Noel Coward used to come to see my grandmother here," he explains. "He would play the piano and... ah... ah..." The hole in the thought allows Sir Trev to jump in triumphantly with "and sing." Sadly, he gets the next one wrong. Showing off his granny's Monet, Charles recalls that "my grandmother was one of the first to really see... ah... ah..."[2] Sir Trev guesses "Monet" but is crushed when his patron in fact says "the impressionists".

Even more unfortunately, being able to guess what the prince will say is not much of a basis for the formal interview, in



Grumpy Old Cybermen

which both the producers and the viewers are hoping he might come out with something surprising. Sir Trev has clearly been primed to get Charles, if at all possible, to say that he does the stuff he does because the government is so useless; but these days the heir is too canny for that. So, when Trev says that he looks at what the Prince's Trust does he thinks "this is the stuff of government policy", Chuck just face-twistingly remarks that there's bound to be a certain overlap but the difference is that he's not a politician.

The producers' other dream response was clearly that the prince would reflect on 7/7 and the war against terror; but Sir Trev's question about how he feels about young British Muslims strapping on suicide vests and murdering their fellow citizens is bizarrely met with the answer that he knows about terrorism because the Irish murdered his uncle. This response was either self-obsession or clever deflection but, whatever it was, completely buggered the headlines the programme wanted.

Failing editorially and pretentious in structure, the documentary was at other times simply weird. Sir Tom Shebbeare, who runs the Prince's Trust, was interviewed while making breakfast but, as the conversation was chopped up during the film, he seems to spend an hour cooking bacon and tomatoes. Aware of his employer's limitations as a media performer, Sir Tom stressed that he is "totally hilarious off-camera". Unfortunately, this television documentary required him to be so on camera and the result was that the producers cooked up a dog's breakfast.

'Remote Controller'

GOING LIVE

"LIVE now to Westminster," said the BBC's Fiona Bruce, introducing a report on Lord Chancellor Charlie Falconer's suggestion that human rights legislation might have to be looked at again.

In fact the correspondent live on the ground wasn't at Westminster but on the other side of the river, with the illuminated palace twinkling in the background. But no matter: it was all entirely pointless. Falconer had made his important announcement from that mighty seat of democracy... the sofa in the studio of Andrew Marr's *Sunday AM* programme!

DUMB BRITAIN

Talksport, Weekend Sports Breakfast

Andy Townsend: How many wheels does a tricycle have?

Caller: Two.

Townsend: The Beatles were known as the Fab...?

Caller: Five.

Bullseye, Challenge TV

Dave Spikey: What was the last thing left in Pandora's box?

Contestant *(after a pause)*: A brush?

DUMB IRELAND

RTE Radio 2fm

Presenter: What is the name of the long-running TV comedy show about pensioners, "Last of the..."?

Caller: Mohicans.

AD NAUSEAM

WITH the World Cup looming, it's heartening to learn that England is indisputably the best team... at making money.

A study in *Marketing* magazine showed that the English FA's revenues from sponsorship deals stood at £49m this year. Italy was a distant second (a paltry £27.6m) and those miserable also-rans Brazil stumbled in fifth.

With the FA having just secured £1.7bn for Premiership rights, the governing body is awash with cash. Where it's all going might be something worth pondering when England go out on penalties in the quarter-finals.

STILL no word from Ofcom on whether Ricky Gervais's much-touted episode of *The Simpsons*, shown last month on Sky, flouted regulations that forbid the blurring of boundaries between advertising and programming.

The episode featured a strangely tenuous plotline in which Homer lusted after a high definition television. It just so happened that Sky's "feel everything" ads for its new high definition service ran before the show, afterwards and in every break.

As Sky had signed up Gervais for a series of trails for the programme, the question for Ofcom is: was Gervais's story influenced by Sky's marketing department?

ASKING someone if they are a raccoon, a dolphin, a canary or a panther is the kind of question that can get you punched in a pub.

However, Orange's gleefully misguided agency, Mother, thought it might be a good way to make phone tariffs more interesting and so convinced its client to plough £10m into the recent "Animals" work. A premise so wholly risible deserves little more comment, other than to say that a month after launch, the Animals campaign has been quietly dropped and will be replaced with a new branding campaign on 1 June.

Raccoons, canaries or otherwise are not expected to feature.

PERHAPS reasoning that its position as sole supplier of ketchup to McDonald's was not hypocrisy enough to disqualify it from promoting HP Sauce with a "Save the Proper British Café" campaign (see *Eye* 1157), Heinz this month announced that production of HP would leave Britain entirely. At the company's Birmingham plant 125 workers will be sacked, and the sauce will now be made in Holland.

So far, 1,400 "Proper Brits" have signed HP's petition to "help British cafes repel the threat of continental chains". The campaign continues.

POPEYE

RADIO 1 DJ Zane Lowe has refused to play the latest record by his own band, Breaks Co-Op, on his evening show, expressing the admirable intention to trade mag *Music Week* that "he is keen for the music to come first".

No such qualms among his colleagues, however: Breaks Co-Op has been added to Radio 1's daytime playlist, receiving 10-15 plays per week on the station. This means the group's single *The Other Side* can be heard alongside The Automatic's *Monster*, A-listed for more than 20 plays per week on shows such as that hosted by Jo Whiley every weekday morning. The Automatic are co-managed by Steve Morton, who happens to be married to… Jo Whiley!

O·B·N

"In my opinion, Rupert Murdoch is the world's greatest living journalist."

PHIL HALL (ex-Editor News of the World)
***Breakfast*, BBC1**

Submitted by Raj Kothari

£10 paid for entries put forward for the Order of the Brown Nose.

JUST FANCY THAT!

RADIO critic Gillian Reynolds informed *Daily Telegraph* readers on 9 May that the new Radio 4 phone-in *Down the Line* was "a spoof… a recorded comedy".

On 12 May, with a deafening fanfare, the *Grauniad* "exclusively" divulged the truth about *Down the Line*. "GOTCHA!... As G2 can reveal, it's a spoof."

A lexicographer writes: "Reveal, v.t. To report something which a rival newspaper reported three days earlier."

BIRTSPEAK

AS THE English language is gradually destroyed by management jargon, surely English teachers can be relied upon as a bastion of proper, plain English?

Not at Waverley School in Birmingham, which is currently advertising for a "Head of English (to be re-titled as Associate Learning Director of Communications under the new structure)".

CRITICS IN CON-TEXT

PRODUCERS of *Footloose*, the musical based on the 1984 film, have proved themselves brilliant adaptors – at least of quotes from reviews.

According to the hoardings splashed across the Novello Theatre and the show's official website, the *Sun* dubbed *Footloose* "sensational", while to the *Express* it was nothing less than "the perfect show".

To be precise, Bill Hagerty wrote in the *Sun* that "despite one sensational country and western-influenced showstopper, this is a sort of poor man's *Saturday Night Fever*, more tongue-tied than Footloose."

Ruth Leon in the *Express* opined that "*Footloose* is not about the plot, nor yet the characters, and it is certainly not about the performances which are almost uniformly end-of-the-pier sub-West End standard, nor the choreography. No, it is about an audience coming to hear songs they already know from the film. It is the perfect show for those who hate surprises."

DA VINCI BALLS

Clues Scattered Throughout History

"LAST night officials at the FA were arguing about exactly about what Luiz Filipe Scolari had said and what it meant. Translators were poring over the text of his comments, as if it were the *Da Vinci Code*." – *Daily Express, 29 April*

"Reading the potential omens is like trying to unravel fact or fiction in *The Da Vinci Code*. Undoubtedly, the Holy Grail for the Bulls is to return to the Football League, but current form is too close to predict after Halifax and Hereford beat each other on home soil in the regular season." – *Birmingham Post, 20 May*

"Ronaldinho will expect close attention from countryman Gilberto Silva tomorrow as well as the wonderfully named and supremely gifted Emmanuel Eboube. Ronaldinho won't be unduly worried. Such is his ability to unlock doors, had he starred in the *Da Vinci Code*, the movie would have lasted five minutes because he would have cracked the riddles so soon." – *Belfast Telegraph, 16 May*

"Spin doctors and general practitioners may disagree on the party line for Marcus Trescothick's sudden sabbatical, but yesterday he unravelled the mystery of Sri Lanka's demon spinner Muttiah Muralitharan more easily than film buffs will decipher the *Da Vinci Code* on its release next week." – *Daily Mirror, 12 May*

"After controlling proceedings for almost three days, England left Lord's last week with worse notices than the *Da Vinci Code*. Their attempts at catching were wooden, melodramatic and looked as though they must have been affected by overexposure to religious psychobabble." – *Independent on Sunday, 21 May*

"Heineken Cup Final: If Tom Hanks in *The Da Vinci Code* thought he had to endure a certain amount of suffering in tracking down an elusive goal, then it is as nothing to the agonies suffered by Anthony Foley and his Munster mates in pursuit of their team's holy grail." – *Daily Telegraph, 20 May*

"But what are the Chancellor's tactics for the lieutenants he leaves behind? Like the Treasury equivalent of the *Da Vinci Code*, Brown never openly says what he means." – *Sunday Herald, 7 May*

"Will he go this year, next year or wait until the end of his third term? Tony Blair has left us with a riddle worthy of a Dan Brown novel." *Northern Echo, 9 May*

"John Reid is said to have called a number of cabinet colleagues since Labour's local election defeat canvassing support for a possible leadership bid… Claims that Mr Reid is holding talks this weekend with Tessa Jowell and Alan Milburn to organise a challenge to Mr Brown were dismissed, however. 'That's one for fans of *The Da Vinci Code*,' said one figure alleged to be plotting." – *Independent on Sunday, 14 May*

"'Cash for honours' is the Da Vinci code of British politics," – Simon Jenkins, *Guardian, 16 May*

"'I DO NOT think conspiracy theories ever work,' declares Michael McLintock. The chief executive of fund manager M&G certainly doesn't look like something out of *The Da Vinci Code*. Then again, I've just asked him whether he engaged in a bit of chicanery himself back in the bear market of late 2002 to try to avert the first dividend cut by M&G's parent company Prudential since the First World War." – *Daily Telegraph, 20 May*

"The Da Vinci Dress Code: Don't Look Glum, Look Glam." – *Daily Mail, 18 May*

Eternal Mysteries

"TO celebrate the launch of *The Da Vinci Code* special edition K750i camera phone, our mates at Sony Ericsson and O2 are offering four readers First Class tickets to Paris and four of the K750i phones. To get your mitts on these fantastic goodies, all you have to do is crack our very own Da Vinci Code. Which Leonardo Da Vinci painting is on Sony Ericsson's Da Vinci Code K750i packaging? a) Moaning Lisa b) Little Lisa c) Mona Lisa." – *"The Goss" column, Daily Star, 15 May*

Unlikely Revelations

"TRAGEDY, drugs, and a dad who wanted to have a sex change op. Even in the weird world of showbiz, few stars have had an upbringing more unconventional than *Da Vinci Code* star Paul Bettany… If his father Thane hadn't been discouraged from having a sex-change operation five years ago, Paul might have had to explain to his co-stars Tom Hanks and Audrey Tatou why his dad was now his second mum. Thane has said: 'I have to pay for it, I'm too old to have it on the NHS… It's an idea I have played about with. In fantasies I've thought it would be much easier to have a relationship.' He added: 'Can you imagine me trying to make my living as an actress?" – *Daily Mirror, 16 May*

"Contrary to our report yesterday, we are happy to point out that actor Paul Bettany's father Thane has never spoken about having a sex change; nor has he ever considered having such a procedure. We apologise for the error." – *Daily Mirror, 17 May*

Licence To Make Money

"THERE are just a few of us left. We are the happily unenlightened who have managed to avoid reading *The Da Vinci Code*. God knows it's been a struggle. Even though I've never flicked a page of either the original or 'The Special Illustrated Collector's Edition', I know more than I want to about this mystic whodunnit." – *Christopher Hirst, Independent, 13 May, devoting his entire column to how he doesn't want to hear anything about the film*

"There is more than enough reason not just to boycott *The Da Vinci Code* – but also to deplore it," - A.N. Wilson, *Daily Mail, 18 May, in the fourth article he has penned on the topic in a fortnight*

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

SIGNAL FAILURES

Sustainable hot air

IN HIS maiden speech as Transport Secretary, Douglas Alexander made zero reference to the pressing issue of a new north-south railway.

Existing north-south mainlines are struggling, with GNER's new franchise hamstrung by lack of space for its promised extra services to Leeds (*Eye* 1152). New Labour isn't interested in solving the capacity problem, either with a new high-speed passenger route or a new freight line to continental standards. And Alexander indicated it would be business as usual by failing to mention the issue in a speech on *The future of transport in the UK*.

Such procrastination wouldn't be tolerated for a moment by the mighty air lobby, and Labour has dutifully agreed to big increases in air travel, including airport expansion. Alexander described this as a "sustainable" strategy. But how sustainable is it to pump more and more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere when global warming is already described as the biggest threat facing the planet? Perhaps the civil servants who wrote his speech were thinking of "sustainable" profits for airlines – including the ones making a packet from north-south flights after a century of non-investment in new mainline railways.

The mandarins should also have known better than to get Alexander to say: "We have the fastest growing railway in Europe" when we have neither the fastest railway nor the fastest-growing railway. Last year passenger numbers in the Great Britain grew 3.9 percent – behind 11 other countries including Bosnia Herzegovina (up 65.9 percent), Ireland, Germany, France and Spain. For passenger kilometres, GB (up 2.9 percent) was behind 12 others including Estonia (up 29.3), Ireland (up 12.6), Greece and France. GB also trailed in the growth of rail freight.

PS: Northern Ireland Railways (still nationalised) saw bigger growth in passenger numbers and kilometres than GB in 2005. "New" Labour suggested closing railways in Northern Ireland six years ago (*Eye* 1004) but was thwarted by the regional assembly.

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER's first engagement was to view the "future of travel" – new buses in York, courtesy of FirstGroup.

His predecessor, Alistair Darling, was delighted when FirstGroup briefed him on its "ftr" (shorthand for future) bus, as it gave Darling an alternative to suggest when scrapping tram schemes (Eye 1153). FirstGroup's big idea was to make a bendy bus look a bit like a tram and badger local councils to upgrade bus lanes. Darling was happy to believe ftr was a cheap substitute for trams; but its first day was marred by long waits for bunched buses, buses forcing oncoming cars on to pavements, failed ticket machines and failed information systems.

That was the best WorstGroup could manage with one short bus route and after months of preparation. Its excuse was that the buses are "a completely new design". Actually diesel buses have been polluting cities for decades. Ticket vending machines and articulated buses are old hat too.

The ftr concept was sold to Darling and others as "bus rapid transit", but ftr buses are allotted 31 minutes to travel from Acomb to York rail station, two miles away. That's an average speed of under 4mph, so travel of the future is apparently to be slower than in Victorian horse-drawn carriages. But Labour is not unhappy: it's spending nothing on tram schemes, and motoring revenues will continue pouring in if ftr remains the official alternative to trams.

'Dr B Ching'

THE COMMUTERS
ALL THE TOILETS ON THIS TRAIN ARE LOCKED AND I'M DESPERATE TO GO...
YOU'LL HAVE TO GET OFF AT THE NEXT STATION...
...AND USE THE LOCKED TOILETS ON THE PLATFORM...
CON RAIL
SRIZELDA

DOING THE ROUNDS

IN AN open letter to Health Secretary Patsy Hewitt, Tony Blair has put "more choice in GP services" at the top of his agenda. But this may be a challenge too far for Hewitt, given that up to 7,000 GPs are set to quit in the next two years, and 75 percent of GP premises are inadequate for future services.

The mass exodus of burned-out fiftysomething GPs has been fuelled by the new GP contract, which has delivered a pension windfall making early retirement too good to resist. The average pay rises for 2003/2004 has led to a pension increase of 12.9 percent, but this is unlikely to last. As *Eye* reader Dr Claire Barchard puts it: "Anyone with any sense will be buying maximum added years and retiring early. No point waiting until the contract is revised, you might miss out. If you miss the job, you can always be a locum and avoid a lot of the tedious bits."

Overall, the number of GPs has increased under New Labour, but as the financial crisis has kicked in, GP registrar posts are now being cut, the flexible career and returner schemes have been axed and we're kicking out all the non-EU trainees who have for years plugged the gaps in the NHS that British doctors won't fill.

As for premises, a BMA survey has found that 59 percent of practices that responded can't safely do what's expected of them at present, and 75 percent don't have the facilities to cope with future demands. Space is so tight that some are giving vaccinations in common rooms and kitchens, and less than half had the room to train future GPs.

Labour's plans to "incentivize" GPs to deliver more services under Practice-Based Commissioning (PBC) have been blighted by lack of interest. GPs quickly spotted that instead of having true autonomy and power, they were just being used as a brake for Payment By Results, the tariff system that has sent hospital costs spiralling out of control. As entrepreneurial GP Tim Richardson put it: **"GPs are not the slightest bit interested in becoming commercial police for the government to reduce costs."**

M.D.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY

THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG WITH MY EARS..
THAT SEEMS TO HAVE COME ON RATHER SUDDENLY
NO, REALLY, I CAN'T HEAR A WORD YOU'RE SAYING..
WELL YOU'VE CERTAINLY STUMPED ME.. SUDDEN TOTAL HEARING LOSS...
AS SOON AS I SAY MY DEPARTMENT NEEDS MORE FUNDING.
ER, HALF PAST THREE
ADMIN

Curse of Gnome

SOME THREE years after demanding (and not getting) £50,000 libel damages from the *Eye*, football agent Paul Stretford has recently been in the high court trying to stop the FA disciplining him for various transgressions of the FA rules, under which he holds (at least for the moment) a formal agents' licence.

Readers will recall his last outing in court in October 2004, when he was the main prosecution witness over his alleged "blackmailing" by rival agents from whom he had stolen boy wonder Wayne Rooney. The prosecution had to be abandoned when documents emerged showing Stretford in the witness box and the truth were complete strangers.

The chancellor of the high court, Sir Andrew Morritt, expressed "surprise" (polite "judicial speak" for complete incredulity) at Stretford's claim, via his solicitor, that he was unfamiliar with FA rules relating to the FA's disciplinary powers and therefore should not be subject to them. At least Stretford appears to have learned one lesson, declining the invitation from the FA's QC to go into the witness box on this occasion to be cross-examined on oath about his claimed lack of knowledge of the very rules his licence requires him to observe.

Sir Andrew duly threw out Stretford's case, so Stretford will now have to try to come up with an explanation for his transgressions, something he is obviously keen not to do.

Theo Walcott
Club: Arsenal Born: 16/03/99 Caps: 0 Goals: 0

Hull Daily Mail

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

BARKING MAD

ALTHOUGH media attention after the 4 May elections focused on the success of the far-right BNP in the London borough of Barking & Dagenham, where 11 of its 13 candidates were elected, the truth is that B&D was a missed opportunity for the fascists.

The BNP had wanted to field a full deck of 51 candidates but, alas, was unable to find sufficient local party members whose colourful pasts did not debar them from standing. Normally this means having had no criminal conviction carrying a custodial sentence of three months or longer in the last five years; evidently a requirement that was too stringent for many BNP members.

The source of this information is none other than Robert Buckley, one of the BNP's successful candidates in Barking. At the count Buckley boasted to everyone within earshot that so many local BNP members had murky pasts the party couldn't muster sufficient candidates to stand – a fact he seemed proud of.

Meanwhile local BNP leader Richard Barnbrook, former gay porn – sorry, "art" – movie director, may yet face disqualification for having given false information. The "home" address Barnbrook gave was 5a London Road, Barking; yet the flat at that address is derelict.

CRAP RAP

IN ANOTHER triumph for the Standards Board for England, Chichester district councillor Taff Davies has been disqualified from holding public office for a year for the heinous crime of calling the council's email system "crap".

The Tory councillor, a retired Royal Navy captain, had annoyed officers by sending a series of emails and letters over a three-year period criticising the council's £11.5m "eGovernment" programme. He handed back his council laptop, preferring to use his own computer, and set up his own website because he said the council's was dull. The adjudication panel found Davies guilty of "failing to treat others with respect", because he had sometimes employed a sarcastic and intemperate tone, and "bringing the authority into disrepute" because he had criticised its IT system and its deputy chief executive at a meeting of local business leaders. Poor diddums!

Crapchester's deputy chief exec, Rob Benny, admitted authorising staff to spy on Davies's emails because it was believed that "when he [Davies] was re-elected to the council in May 2003, he had a predisposition to be critical of the council IT policy and provision". Benny said this was a "normal precaution where there were concerns about the conduct of a member".

And it's true – in Benny's world, and that of the Standards Board, it is "normal" for unelected officials to spy on elected representatives of the people, and then, if they ask too many awkward questions, spend £35,000 of the people's money to get rid of them.

● **OPEN GOVERNMENT UPDATE: "Members voted 15 to 8 in favour of approving the application. There is no record of how any individual member voted and the committee clerk's notes had been destroyed in accordance with the council's Freedom of Information policy..." – *from the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales's report into a complaint of maladministration against Pembrokeshire County Council.***

ILL WIN

ALL the Sunderland Labour deadbeats featured recently in this column were re-elected on 4 May, with the exception of drunkard Kevin O'Connor. Porn addict Tommy "the teapot" Wright, suspended briefly last year after more than 4,000 hard core images were found on his council laptop, has been made vice-chair of the children's services review committee. Very appropriate. Paul "Stabber" Watson, who was involved in a fight which ended in a man's death in 1993, has become deputy leader. And David Allan, accused of stealing trade unionists' subscription money, remains cabinet member for resources. Who better to be in charge of a £500m budget? Meanwhile Cllr David "Sticky Fingers" Tate becomes chair of the influential policy scrutiny committee. Back in 1990 Tate lost the chairmanship of planning after it was revealed that he had accepted freebies from a developer.

There is no shortage of disgust in Sunderland at the behaviour of the city's Labour councillors. But neither the Tories nor the Lib Dems benefited from the large number of protest votes. Those – nearly 10,000 of them – went to the BNP, although the Nazis did not win any seats.

● **BACK in August 2005, in the wake of the general election, Inspector Graham Brown, of the Met's government affairs unit, claimed that "remarkably little electoral fraud has recently been perpetrated in Tower Hamlets". In his letter to the London Assembly's election review committee, he said a Special Branch investigation had found that the "public perception" of electoral fraud was "wholly at variance with reality".**

Nine months and one local election later, it seems that the voters' "perceptions" are still askew. Hundreds of East Enders have claimed since 4 May that they have had their postal votes stolen by fraudsters. Dozens of witness statements name candidates, mosque officials and other community leaders as among the perpetrators. Four Special Branch officers are now trying to find out whether this is still "wholly at variance with reality".

Knacker may yet have to admit that Tower Hamlets is not full of delusional nutters – even though they did elect George Galloway as their MP last year.

"They need to house supermarket workers"

SO FAREWELL, THEN...

LAST YEAR Peterborough City Council's former Tory leader Neville "Fuck the Irish" Sanders (*Eyes passim*) succeeded in the high court in having his two year ban on holding public office, imposed by the Adjudication Panel for England for saying rude things about the Irish, reduced.

Mr Justice Wilkie ruled that Sanders' constituents had elected him despite knowing what a dreadful old bigot he was, so that trumped anything the Standards Board might say. (Ken Livingstone's lawyers cited the case in an attempt to head off the London mayor's own suspension earlier this year over his "concentration camp guard" outburst to a Jewish reporter.) On 4 May, however, the voters, having had more time to reflect on Sanders' behaviour, kicked him out in favour of Independent candidate David Harrington – despite a general swing to the Tories in Pottyborough which saw them gain three seats overall.

One ballot box from Sanders' ward was mislaid and only found after the result had been declared. But even if those votes had been taken into account Vile Nev would still have lost. Nevertheless he is going back to the high court once more to plead that, despite polling less than his rival, he should be allowed to keep his seat in order to carry on the... er... good work..

● **AND AU REVOIR to another *Eye* favourite, former Richmond Council leader Tony "Pants on Fire" Arbour, who said last year that he "considered it a badge of honour to be featured in Private Eye". The opportunities for honouring Cllr Arbour may be less for the time being, since the Tories lost control of the borough to the Lib Dems on 4 May. Arbour has now stepped down from the group leadership to spend more time with his badge collection.**

In The Courts

IT'S BEEN a bad couple of weeks in the courts for litigious Lord Ballyedmond.

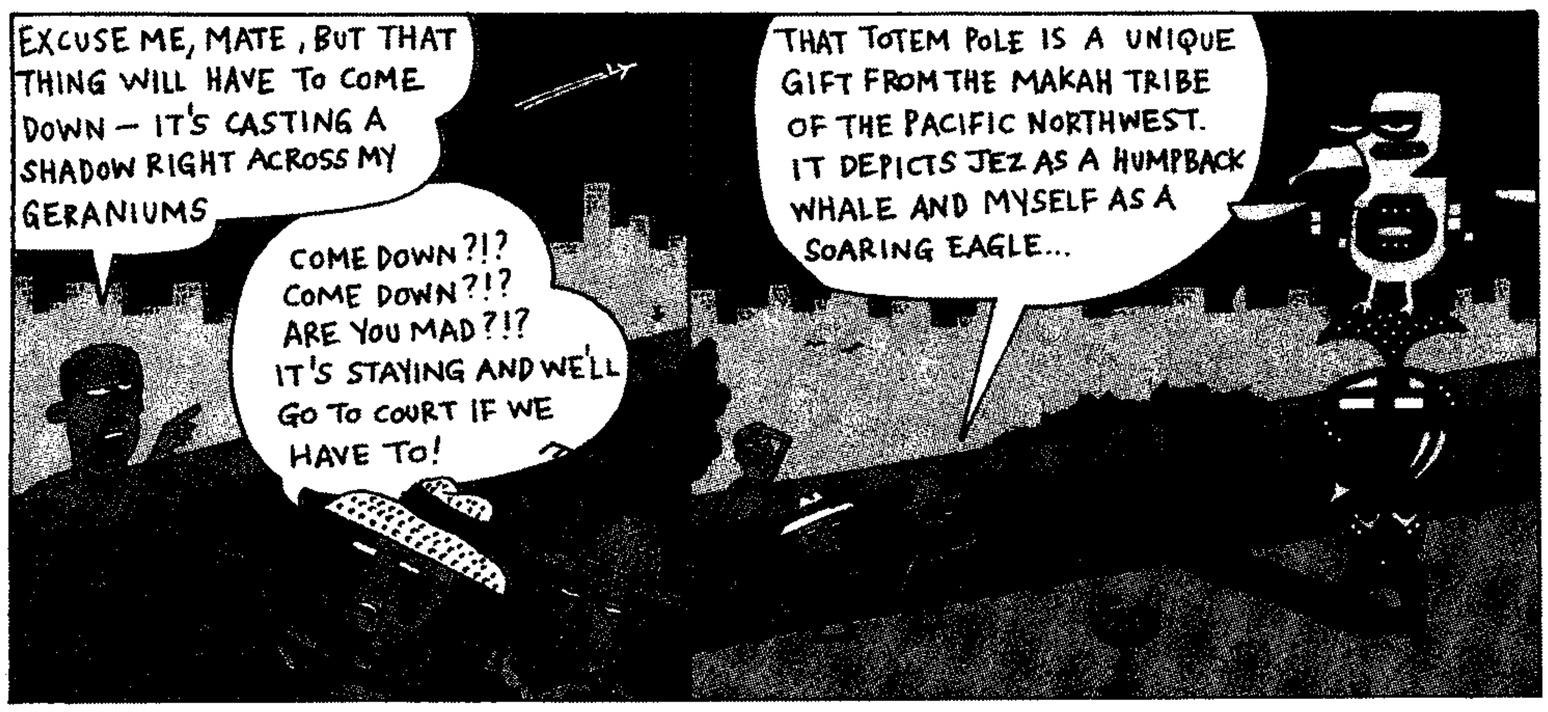
First, three judges in Belfast threw out an appeal by the Ulster Unionist peer who wanted squatter's rights over a cottage adjoining his castle estate in County Down. The judges said ruled that it still belonged to someone else.

Next, the high court in London halted his libel case against Great Corby parish councillor Nigel Holmes (see *Eye* 1152 and 1154). This concerned Lord Ballyedmond's claim that a letter opposing his company's application for planning permission in the village was defamatory.

Ballyedmond's *other* castle, Corby Castle, is of course in the Cumbria village and his company, Norbrook Laboratories, owns the local Queen Inn. A number of residents signed a pre-prepared circular objecting to plans for extra car parking there and raising concerns about traffic and noise, and sent it to the local council. Mr Holmes denies being the author of the letter.

Mr Justice Gray said that Lord Ballyedmond's lawyers were reading imputations in the letter "which are simply not to be found within it" and that the meaning complained of was not defamatory. Ballyedmond's legal team was given two weeks to change its complaint if it wants to continue the case.

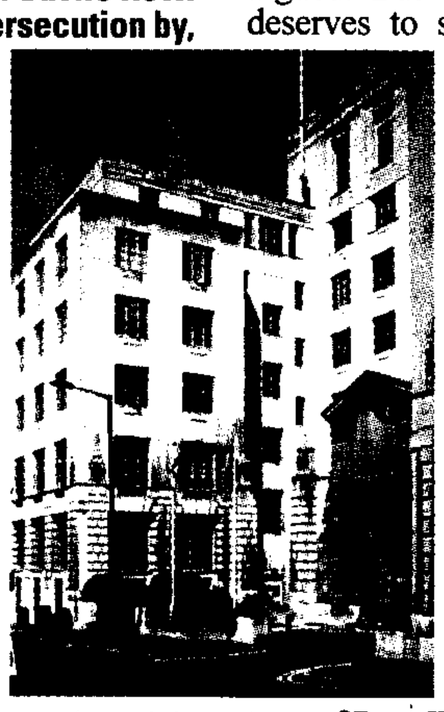
IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON — KNIFE & PACKER


EXCUSE ME, MATE, BUT THAT THING WILL HAVE TO COME DOWN – IT'S CASTING A SHADOW RIGHT ACROSS MY GERANIUMS
COME DOWN?!? COME DOWN?!? ARE YOU MAD?!? IT'S STAYING AND WE'LL GO TO COURT IF WE HAVE TO!
THAT TOTEM POLE IS A UNIQUE GIFT FROM THE MAKAH TRIBE OF THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST. IT DEPICTS JEZ AS A HUMPBACK WHALE AND MYSELF AS A SOARING EAGLE...

NOOKS and CORNERS

BOXES of documents and redundant office furniture line the forlorn corridors of Fortress House as English Heritage prepares to leave its home in Savile Row. Along with the indifference of, and persecution by, the government, it all adds to the demoralisation of the statutory body whose job is to protect our architectural heritage.

English Heritage has been evicted as the Department of Culture, Media 'n' Sport (DCMS) decided to do a deal with the ground landlords, Messrs Legal & General, and surrender the lease prematurely. Some English Heritage staff will now move temporarily to Bunhill Fields; others have been forced to join the Gadarene flight to Swindon (joining the National Trust in exile), which will add to the organisation's marginalisation (do these blinkered organisations ever wonder why capital cities exist?) For those who care about historic buildings, the Blair era is as depressing as any period since the time of Macmillan.



The immediate scandal, however, is that No 23 Savile Row – or Fortress House (as Sir Jocelyn "Piranha Teeth" Stevens told staff *not* to call it as it might create the wrong image) – will probably be demolished. And English Heritage abetted this lamentable state of affairs by not opposing the granting of a certificate of immunity from listing by the DCMS – yet another misuse of this device resorted to more and more frequently by our developer-friendly government.

Fortress House deserves listing, as the Twentieth Century Society and SAVE Britain's Heritage have argued. But even if it is not listed, the building deserves to survive as it is well built, of good materials (it is faced in Portland stone), and provides comfortable, adequate, naturally-ventilated office accommodation without expensive and environmentally-unfriendly mechanical services. For all the vapid, idle talk of combating climate change, it is as if the government had never heard of such concepts as embodied energy. To replace a well-made serviceable structure is simply a wicked waste.

But Fortress House certainly does merit listing. Like the superbly built and tactful New Change buildings behind St Paul's Cathedral (which are to be replaced by pseudish High Tec drivel by Jean Nouvel), it belongs to a type of Post-War commercial architecture which has not been taken seriously enough (until it is too late).

Classical in style, it is semi-traditional (or semi-modern) and, in consequence, has a more civilized urban character as well as performing much better than the cheaper, glass-walled commercial blocks of the 1960s. Built in 1949-50, Fortress House was constructed under the 1947 "Lessor Scheme" which permitted private developers to proceed with commercial projects which were pre-let for government use. It was first occupied by the Ministry of Town & Country Planning, followed by the Ministry of Health. It has been the home of English Heritage for a quarter of a century.

More to the point, Fortress House is fine architecture. It was designed by W. Curtis Green, Son & Lloyd; that is, by William Curtis Green, the distinguished former Arts & Crafts architect who later designed the Dorchester Hotel, working with his son-in-law Anthony Lloyd. The accommodation is arranged in blocks of varying heights cleverly arranged around an entrance courtyard. At a low level, there is fine rusticated detail and vaguely Deco ornament carved in Portland stone.

The general effect is at once utilitarian and dignified, for, like other such buildings, Fortress House was an intelligent response to difficult economic conditions and to the new modernist aesthetic by a well-trained, resourceful traditionalist. But, unfortunately, such buildings were largely ignored in English Heritage's listing survey of post-war architecture, and have suffered from blinkered prejudice by modernists who considered them culpably reactionary.

So, when Fortress House is vacated, there is nothing to stop it being destroyed. Westminster City Council has granted planning consent for two denser, and much less elegant redevelopment schemes, which will occupy every inch of the site. SAVE Britain's Heritage, however, points out that Fortress House, with its forecourt and grand entrance in the manner of Lutyens, would be very suitable for conversion into an hotel. And, given its central location just off Regent Street, this would be a serious commercial proposition which would bring Legal & General as much income as demolition and redevelopment. A scheme is being worked up with a hotel consortium, and if sanity rather than the DCMS prevails, this may ensure the preservation of Curtis Green's late masterpiece. But when in Blair's Britain did sanity ever prevail?

'Piloti'

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

Arias & Elbows

NO ESCAPE from Daniel Barenboim, who as the BBC's 2006 Reith lecturer has been wittering vacuously for weeks while being fed polite questions from people who, in an absurd pretence at spontaneity, were addressed as "Gentleman in the third row" (Julian Lloyd Webber) or "Man at the back" (Alfred Brendel).

In an even sillier pantomime, he's now been appointed to Riccardo Muti's former job in charge of La Scala, Milan. Except La Scala and Barenboor himself are bending over backwards to say he hasn't. Or not really. He won't have the title "music director" or any title at all. Indeed, it's made to sound as if he'll simply drop by from time to time and ask: Anything doing tonight? How about I conduct a show?

La Scala has been in chaos since it sacked Maestro Muti a year ago following rows so violent the police were called. Suitable candidates haven't exactly been queuing up to replace him; and La Scala realised it didn't need a new music director so much as a visit from the cavalry. It put out a rescue plea to other opera houses: can we borrow your productions, expertise and music director until we sort ourselves out?

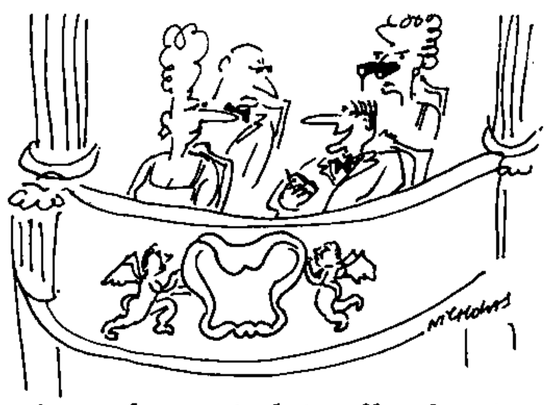
The Berlin State Opera, where Barenboor is the MD, answered the call. But why so coy about acknowledging his new job? Because La Scala is embarrassed and afraid of being seen as subservient to Berlin. So it's pretending Barenboor won't be in charge even though he will be.

The man himself is happy not to be the official MD in case the rescue deal goes wrong. But the supreme irony at the home of Italian opera is that Barenboim is a Wagnerite and no damned good at the Italians. The 7th Cavalry might have taken a wrong turning.

IN LONDON, meanwhile, opera lovers and Arts Council England are praying that when Vernon Ellis is revealed as the new ENO chairman, the company will stabilise.

But it could be a forlorn hope given that he is the business suit (creator of the management consultancy Accenture) whose gimmicky notions have already helped internal politics at ENO resemble the plot of *Macbeth*.

Sean Doran, who was appointed ENO boss by Ellis and his predecessor, banker Martin Smith, was ousted after just 30 months and has now



"I don't need to switch it off – the ringtone is 'cough... cough... cough'"

fired a broadside at the ENO board. Instead of just smarting under newspaper attacks inspired by his successor, John Berry, about his lack of forward planning, Doran is threatening to escape the purdah imposed by Ellis's severance agreement.

The truth isn't pretty. In effect Doran's lieutenant, Berry, took ENO over by persuading Ellis and Smith to switch horses mid-stream. Having so easily dumped Doran's predecessor Nicholas Payne in 2002, this was business as usual for Ellis. But for Arts Council chair Sir Christopher Frayling, Ellis's decision to replace Doran with Berry and executive director Loretta Tomasi (who promptly told the *Observer* she knew nothing about opera) set a very poor precedent. A company with £16m taxpayers' subsidy ought perhaps seek a slate of candidates and hold proper interviews.

Ellis the management consultant had prepared the ground for the volte-face with a bizarre gimmick called "360 degrees". This personnel audit by outside consultants reverses the pecking order *Trading Places*-style, and invites all in the office to comment on everybody else. Cue open season for the poison pen brigade.

Oddly, the fuse for mutiny appears to have been Anthony Minghella's hit *Butterfly* that suggested Doran's season might actually be a success. Berry, now on terms with Ellis, pushed his ambition.

It would now be a major scandal to confirm Berry and Tomasi in their posts without exploring a full range of alternatives. But the Arts Council is so obsessed with its own survival it may be past caring.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

They say that the Tate always includes a "shock" artist, for the publicity...
TURNER PRIZE SHORTLIST HORROR!
GROTESQUE FETISHISTIC CLAY WOMEN WITH HUGE MISSHAPEN BREASTS AND GENITALS.
REBECCA WARREN
That's right—one of them's a painter!
PRIZE

Letters

Rachel Corrie, peace activist

Sir,

Natalie Smith's letter (Eye 1158) disputing that Rachel Corrie was a peace activist had me scratching my head. After all, Rachel Corrie was an activist with the International Solidarity Movement, a peace activism organisation that engages in non-violent protest over Israeli presence in the West Bank. As for blocking an IDF bulldozer that was "trying to uncover tunnels used by Hamas to smuggle weapons", what the IDF's statement actually **said** *was that it was searching for terrorist booby-traps and never officially that it was looking for a tunnel; and last I heard the building in question was later demolished and the IDF discovered no tunnel* **or** *booby-traps, and no evidence of a previous tunnel. Whatever the IDF's plans, it is extremely unlikely that Rachel Corrie blocked the bulldozer because* **she** *believed that there was a Hamas weapons-smuggling tunnel and wanted to stop the IDF finding it.*

None of that leaves me bothered as much as the "being killed by the big bad Jew is always going to be more appealing than the truth line", insinuating that the Eye has an anti-Semitic agenda because it described a peace activist who was killed by an IDF bulldozer as – gasp! – a peace activist. I'm failing to see the prejudice against Jews there, especially when the Solidarity Movement was co-founded by an Israeli Jew. Or are we to assume any criticism of the actions of Israeli military & political actions is due to anti-Semitism?...

CHARLES ELLIS.

...Natalie Smith asks how you can call Rachel Corrie a peace activist and claims that the bulldozer which killed her was trying to uncover tunnels used to smuggle weapons. That's curious, I thought it was about to destroy the home of a Palestinian doctor! And of course it was an accident, as Israeli bulldozer drivers can't see fluorescent jackets!

Judging by what Ms Smith calls the truth, it would appear that her sources are the very honest, reliable ones of the Israeli embassy! I would suggest she instead starts to look at reports from human rights activists working on the ground such as the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions. There she will learn that over 12,000 Palestinian homes have been demolished since 1967, many in the course of Israel's collective punishment policy and to make way for the separation barrier and illegal settlements.

She may be interested to know that last year, I organised and sang in the world premiere of Phillip Munger's classical cantata for Rachel Corrie, "The Skies are Weeping". Many of the organisers, donors and audience members were, like myself, signatories of Jew for Justice for Palestinians, who object to Israel's brutal occupation of the Palestinian territories...

DEBORAH FINK.

...Rachel Corrie was trying to protect the home of pharmacist Samid Nasrallah when she died. The Israeli Defence Force eventually demolished the house in January 2004. Stopping an army from destroying people's homes by getting in their way is non-violent peace activism, whether you agree with the reasons for doing so or not. Denigrating the dead is repugnant.

Natalie Smith is a fucking liar and I hope she burns in hell for her lack of humanity.

I think that pretty much sums things up...

KEVIN BLOWE.

So much hot air

Sir,

Re: In The Back, Eye 1155.

To say that aviation emissions are "the greatest contributor to greenhouse gases" is both untrue and misleading. You probably should not publish this, as it will start an unrelenting obfuscation of the truth. But, and I know what I am talking about and have zero axes to grind, the facts are these:

UK domestic aviation emissions are tiny. UK's contribution to global aviation emissions are contentious as we are a major flight hub. If we look at all flights departing (best measure there exists) then current emissions are, I think, about 4 MtC [million tonnes of carbon]. (You can check on the Defra website.) This **is** *predicted to rise rapidly, to about 12 MtC by 2030, I think. Given surface transport emissions are 35 MtC, then clearly these are the ones to tackle first. Rail is practically insignificant, too.*

DAVID BROWN,

Via email.

Hold tight

Sir,

Instead of criticising New Labour for prudence (Eye 1158) Dr B Ching should consider another reason why the government is dragging its feet funding new tram schemes. Could it be because they are strategically and financially rubbish compared to modern buses?

He/she should try asking the Scottish Executive what the new benefit/cost ratio for the slimmed-down Edinburgh tram scheme is. Earlier figures were in the public domain but now strangely the new figure is "commercially confidential". All this with the Scottish Parliament passing the Edinburgh Trams act without a business case. Fares please!

JOHN BARKESS,

Edinburgh.

Percentage game

Sir,

What a bizarre Number Crunching (Eye 1158). Regarding the rise in Conservative local election votes, it isn't the percentage improvement that matters but the number of additional votes this equates to. A candidate polling two votes instead of one can rejoice at a 100 percent improvement and yet still have no chance at all of being elected!

Furthermore, you have to consider how close the candidates are to being elected in the first place. 2 percent more votes for Cameron almost certainly means more to the Tories than 8 percent did for Hague.

Didn't you do maths at school?

Yours,

WARREN EARL,

Via email.

● *Under William Hague's leadership the Tory share of the local election vote went up from 25 percent under John Major in 1995 to 33 percent in 1999; Cameron took it up from 38 percent under Michael Howard in 2004 to 40 percent. In terms of numbers behind the percentage, Hague's Tories gained 1,342 council seats as opposed to Cameron's 316, and took control of 48 councils as opposed to Cameron's 11.*

"Don't be fooled... he has his dark side"

Scenes You Seldom See

"It's very exciting... Emma's spending her gap year in Cardiff where she is going to work as a hotel receptionist"

Modern nursery crimes

Sir,

As much as I appreciate satire, as a psychiatric nurse working with children I need to point out that the update of Wee Willie Winkie (Modern Nursery Rhymes, Eye 1157) is more than a little off the mark. Ritalin is not administered by injection, nor should it be given at bedtime as it can actually ***interfere*** *with sleep. Ritalin is not a sedative but a* ***stimulant*** *which is why it can be effective in improving concentration and the focusing of attention.*

Faithfully,

DOUGLAS PIKE BA, RMN,

Rampton, Cambridge.

Wrong diagnosis

Sir,

Re. M.D.'s article (1158) in relation to the PSA test and the suggested patchy evidence for the benefits of treatment.

Apart from my own experience of having a radical surgical removal of prostate (not to be undergone casually as the aftermath can be problematical, as I have discovered), the excellent Prostate Cancer Charity supplies a comprehensive range of information and a confidential phone helpline, both free. I recommend them without reserve.

It is well known about the shortcomings of the usual PSA test, but there is another PSA test called a PSA2 (not available on the NHS) which is said to be 90 percent accurate. If it was not for the usual PSA test, my cancer would have been undetected and I suspect my life expectancy would have been shortened by a good number of years. The surgery is not performed unless there is a further life expectancy of at least 10 years. The surgeons have tables to calculate these things.

What M.D. seems to suggest is that we should wait until our cancer rears its head and then endure a few years of torment until we fall off of the twig. It should be said that many men don't want to know about these things (see the latest campaign by the Prostate Cancer Charity) but some of us are prepared for the treatment even if the consequences are daunting so that our quality and length of life may be better.

Yours sincerely,

JOHN CORCORAN,

Via email.

Reign is forecast...

Sir,

So "Gavel Basher" thinks it unlikely we shall have another monarch's jubilee for "a good 20 years or more". Brenda's diamond is, in fact, only six years away. Off with his head!

IVOR DAVIES,

Chatham, Kent.

Lookalike

Toynbee **Clarke**

Sir,

Nicky Clarke and Polly Toynbee appear to be twins. She might have recently refused to tell the Eye how much she earns, but do you think she can afford his £425-per-cut fees?

Best wishes,
ENA B. DALES,

Via email.

Hit and myth

Sir,

What is it with Private Eye (Satanic Panic – The Mything Link, Eye 1158). The only one panicking is the (still) anonymous author of these articles. Those of us who recognise the reality of Satanist Abuse have long since ceased to panic, despite our continuing horror regarding the practices entailed.

Incidentally, dissociation is hardly a "relatively new theory" within psychotherapy. It was described by Pierre Janet in the early 1900s and later, of course, by Freud.

However, all this is history. We know that the government researcher did an effective demolition job in 1994, so why the current panic?

Yours,
DR JOAN COLEMAN, MRCPSYCH.,
RAINS Co-ordinator, Guildford.

Sir,

Please may I post your piece (Satanic Panic – The Mything Link, Eye 1158) on my web page so that I can correct the factual errors made. (I am sure your readers do not need help in untangling innuendos or smears.)

Thank you for publicising the new course on Attachment and Dissociation. As a result of the new neurobiological research and international standardised research on attachment patterns, there is far greater awareness of the impact of trauma on mental distress. My talk on Spiritual Abuse was about ritual abuse within mainstream religions (such as paedophile priests and altar boys) which can destroy some people's sense of their religion as a refuge. I was also concerned with the way people's family attachment patterns either enhance or damage their belief systems – something even more crucial when we consider suicide bombers. But perhaps your reviewer is only interested in destructive acts which come from a Satanist background.

DR VALERIE SINASON,

Via email.

Glamorous Assisted Suicide

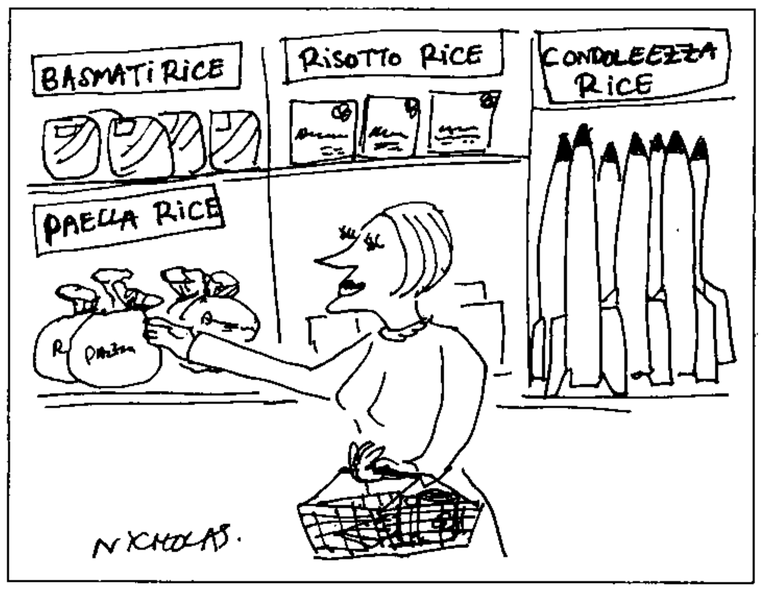
The Mee generation

Sir,

Your memory for newspapers aimed at primary schoolchildren may be longer than Piers Morgan's (Eye 1158), but not much. Readers of an earlier vintage may have fond memories of the "Children's Newspaper", founded by Arthur Mee, who was also responsible for the "Children's Encyclopaedia" and the "King's England" series of county guides. It was distributed at my primary school around 1950, but as Mee died in 1943 it must have been going long before that.

It was probably not the sort of thing Mr Morgan is producing. For a start, the title would never do now, with its patronising suggestion that readers might be in some way – well, children. And its coverage of certain vital areas, such as the pop music scene and pre-teen fashion, was quite frankly hopeless. I remember winning a certificate in one of its handwriting competitions, but somehow I don't think this would be a big selling point today.

Yours nostalgically,
DEREK GREATREX,
Caversham, Berks.



Bird watching

Sir,

Unlike your correspondent Jan Vilikovsky (Eye 1158) I am a pedant of Serbian variety and feel obliged to point out that "kos" means "blackbird" in Serbian, and not "thrush" (which is "drozd").

Keep up the good work.

Yours,
A. TASLIC,

Via email.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"Peter Crouch is absolutely centrifugal to England's World Cup chances."
MIKE PARRY, TalkSport Radio
(Philip Todd)

"It defied gravity and dropped like a stone..."
Commentator, Sky Sports
(Paul Laing)

"There is no player alive today, with the exception of Don Bradman, who hasn't gone through a bad patch."
MICHAEL ATHERTON, Sky Sports
(Paul Lloyd)

"There's no magic formula that says A plus C equals X."
TERRY VENABLES
(Richard English)

"The clock seems to be moving quicker. For the first time, the sight is in end."
DAVID PLEAT, ITV
(Colin McNicoll)

"This is a Cup Final in its own right."
JOHN MOTSON, BBC1
(Rustam Al-Shahi)

SOLUTIONS

"Office Depot: Delivering Winning Solutions That Inspire Worklife" – *office supplies*

"Archive and Share from Storex offers a choice of digital storage solutions" – *boxes for computer disks*

"The Commission for Integrated Transport recommends demand responsive transport solutions should be considered where cost-effective" – *taxis*

"Mainetti: Apparel hanging solutions" – *coat hangers*

"Southco, a global leader in engineered access solutions" – *door handles*

All submitted by readers

DJ rocks

Sir,

I have just read the latest Pseuds Corner, and was astonished to see Tim Westwood feature. To the lay person it must have been very confusing, but having been "down" with the scene for some years I must say Mr Westwood's entry made perfect sense to me (which was a first for Pseuds). Let me translate: "As a Club DJ I rock bangers that create crazy excitement in the party"; I play good tunes in a discotheque. "The original was a hood classic"; It was big via word of mouth. "Shit is straight banging"; It was a very enjoyable record. "ATL"; Above The Law (good). "Shottas"; A ghetto drama. "It's an ugly situation"; It's an interesting time. Hope that helps.

Yours,
SIMEON D. BERENDS,

Via email.

Serious complaint

Sir,

I wish to complain about the letter in issue 1158 from "Iva Biggan". This is obviously a made-up name. It is equally obvious that the author's only reason for submitting this letter was to see it in print. It was a silly letter from a stupid person. Your magazine should not be encouraging such childish antics.

Yours faithfully,
SMARTING BUTTOCK,

Finland.

Important point

Sir,

I couldn't help but notice the acronym of the British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons (BAAPS) in the papers this week.

Do you think any of your readers would find it as funny as I did, or should I be writing to Viz?

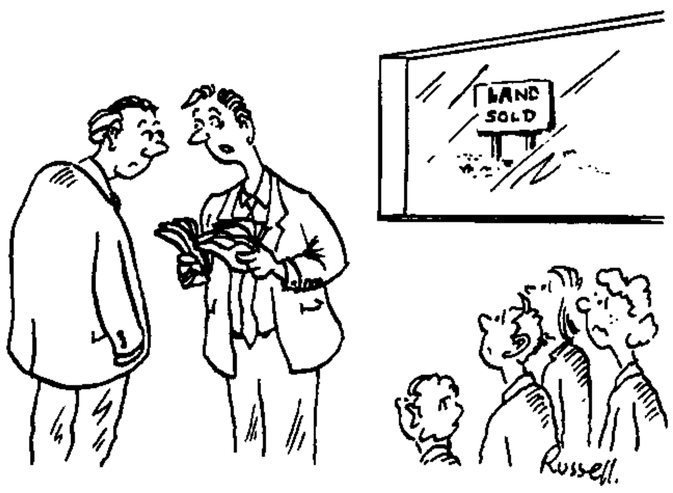
Yours,
SIMON CASSINI,

Via email.

So what they will make of the Brenner's Park Hotel in Germany, where they are staying for the World Cup, is anyone's guess.

This stately and gentile venue, which dates back to 1872,

Daily Telegraph



"They've all brought parental notes asking that they be allowed PE lessons"

Down on the Farm

HOW could a single potato peeling end up costing a farmer £2m? True, the answer is "only with difficulty". But the question still arises thanks to the latest bureaucratic nonsense to be visited on Britain's 200,000 farmers and growers, and the wisdom of the European Court of Justice (ECJ).

For 15 years Brussels has been working overtime to impose on the EU's citizens a deluge of laws prescribing how we are allowed to dispose of waste. The UK government long insisted that these rules would pose such particular problems for farmers that agriculture should be exempted. But the European Commission took the UK to the ECJ, which ruled that Britain's farmers must obey the law just like everyone else.

The result has been new waste management regulations which came into force on 15 May. On pain of fines up to £20,000 for each offence, farmers must now comply with rules governing every conceivable aspect of what Brussels defines as "waste", from the manure heap in the yard to clippings when they cut back their hedges; from the sprout stalks they leave to rot down in their fields to the rubble needed to repair farm tracks.

All this now comes under the eagle eye of officials of the Environment Agency; and woe betide any farmer caught out not filling in all the necessary paperwork and asking for all the necessary permissions. The most ferocious new requirements are reserved for anything that can be described as a "dump" or "tip". Even "a single deposit of waste" can be defined as a "dump" (hence that single potato peeling).

If you had a "tip" on your farm before 15 May, you cannot now add any new item to it, and you can only keep it for a year before you must pay up to £228 a tonne to have it taken by a licensed waste contractor to a licensed tip. Even the tiniest fragment of "hazardous waste", such as a single asbestos cement roof slate, makes the whole lot "hazardous waste". You must then pay a lot more to have it taken to one of only 10 sites in the UK still permitted to take such waste.

It may be possible to carry on disposing of most farm "waste" in a traditional manner, but only so long as one applies in writing to the Environment Agency for an "exemption" from the rules. One now needs an official exemption, for instance, to burn any wood on the farm, such as the clippings from hedge-trimming (but if the fire contains any paper to get it going, this is a criminal offence). For a manure heap one needs a "manure management exemption", exemptions for a compost heap, to allow cabbage stalks to rot in a field, even, it seems, to allow cows to drop cowpats.

The annual cost of all this, just to the farmers of England and Wales, is estimated by those thoughtful officials in Defra at "between £28.7m and £69.8m". This, we must assume, includes the cost of hiring the hundreds of new officials needed to process more than a million exemption applications. But the worst fate of all is reserved for any farmer who wants to keep a "tip" in being for more than a year. This requires a full "waste management licence", the cost of which can be as much as £2m. Leave that potato peeling on the ground for more than a year, and that is what you could be in for.

'Muckspreader'

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

O "The hypothesis for my science project was simple," twelve-year-old Jasmine Roberts told reporters at Benito Middle School in New Tampa, Florida. "I suggested that the ice in fast food restaurants would contain more bacteria than the water in their toilets, then set out to prove it. Using sterile gloves and a beaker, I scooped water from the toilets in five local fast food restaurants. Then I collected ice from their soda fountains, and cups of ice from their drive thru windows. I then tested the samples and found that, 70% of the time, the ice from the restaurant contained more bacteria than the toilet water."

Commenting on the results of her research (which won first prize in a regional science competition), Dr David Katz said "the ice is likely dirtier because the machines aren't cleaned regularly, and people scoop ice up in unwashed hands. Toilet water is surprisingly free of bacteria, because it comes from sanitized city water supplies, and only touches the toilet bowl."

Jasmine's elder brother added "when she told me her project idea, I gave her a high five and said 'you're a strange little kid.' But I supported her all the way." *(Tampa Bay 10 News, 20/2/06. Spotter: Brendan Joseph O'Byrne)*

– O –

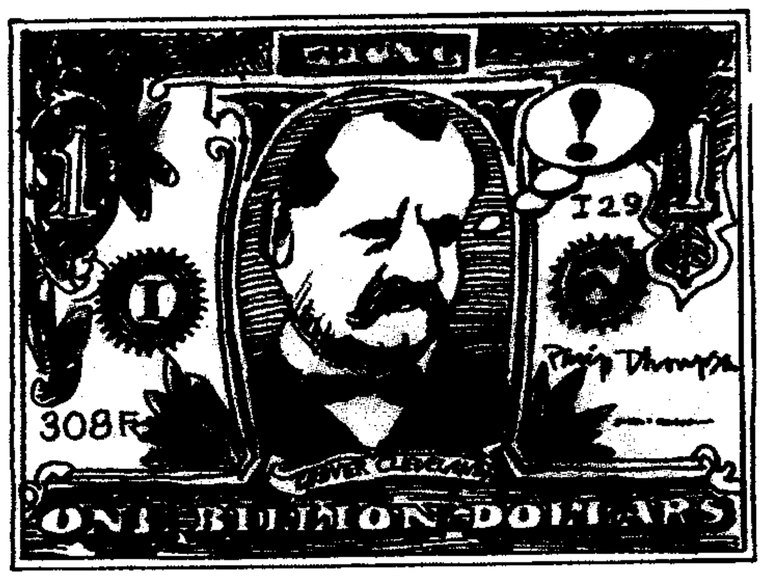
O *"The government can rot in hell before I fill in their cheeky damned form," Graeme Cairns told supporters in Garden Palace in Hamilton, New Zealand, as he stepped into a deep freezer on the eve of National Census Day. "The law says every living person must fill in the census form, but I've thought of a way to avoid it. I'm going to cryogenically freeze myself tonight, and be pronounced legally dead, so I won't be required to fill in the form. Then at midnight tomorrow, I'll be removed and thawed out again."*

Speaking from his own bed two days later, Cairns told reporters that "I have a snuffly cold and a splitting headache, but am otherwise none the worse for wear. I'm naturally used to the cold, you see, because my parents owned a frozen food factory. It was well worth it, because I've avoided the census, with all its personal questions that the government compels citizens to answer, under threat of punishment. This isn't the first time I've thwarted the census people. In 1996 I hovered over Garden Palace in a hot air balloon, and was deemed in court to have been out of New Zealand's legal air space. In 1986, I claimed to have been possessed by the spirit of an ancient ape on Census Day, and therefore not legally a person, although the judge overruled me on that. Next Census Day, I intend to hypnotise myself into becoming a turnip, because root vegetables do not have to fill out census forms." (Waikato Times, 6/3/06. Spotter: Tom Rodwell)

– O –

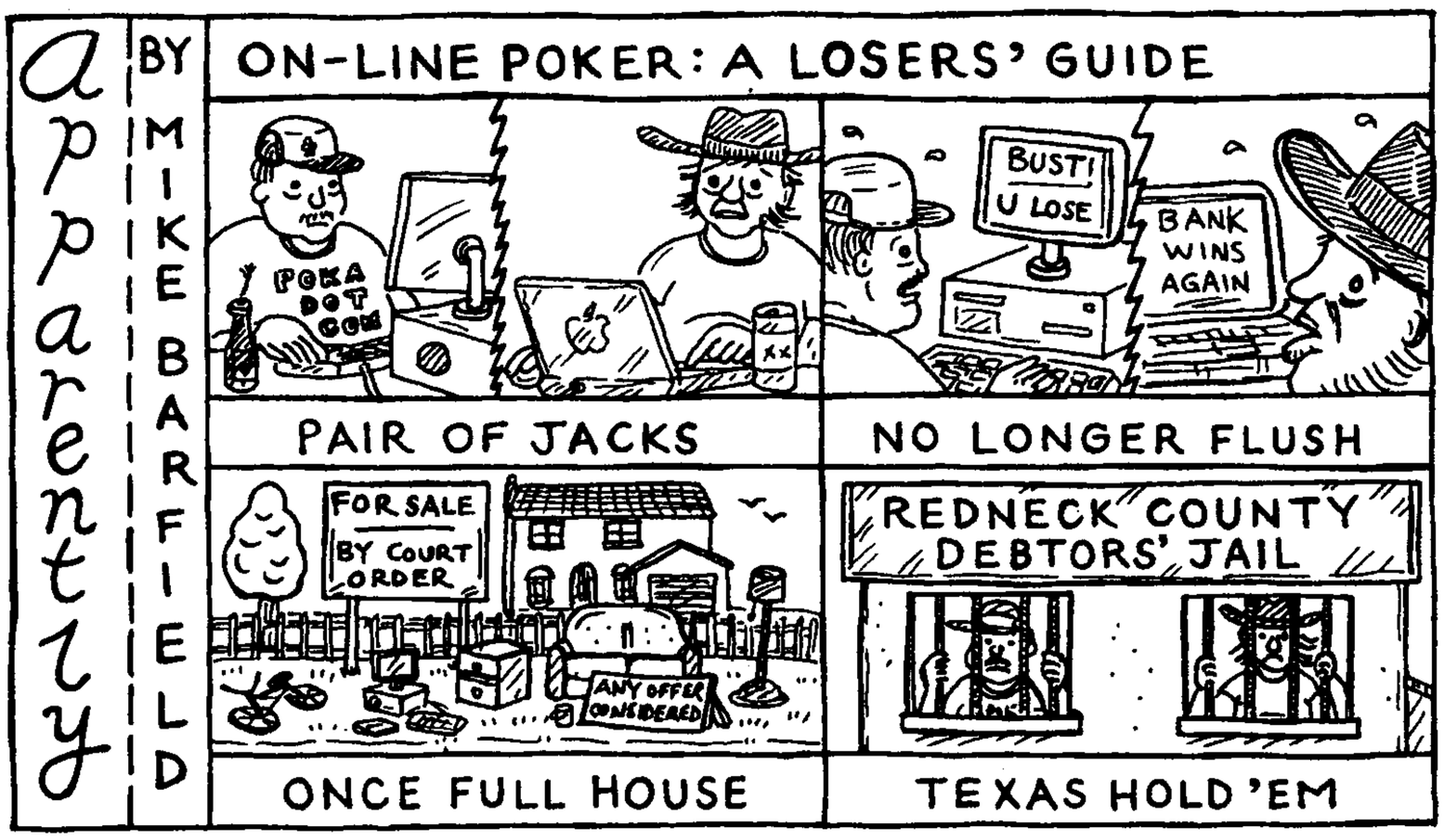
O "These counterfeit bills are pretty good forgeries," Secret Service Agent James Todak told a press conference in Los Angeles, "and at first glance, they look quite convincing. They've been stained and aged to make them look yellowing and wrinkled, with an issue date of 1934, authentic serial numbers, and a picture of President Grover Cleveland, but the forger made one fatal mistake. He got greedy, and didn't realise there's no such thing as a one billion dollar bill."

Todak was speaking after the arrest of Tekle Zigetta, who subsequently pleaded guilty to smuggling counterfeit currency from South Korea into the United States. A colleague



added that "If he'd printed $100 bills of this quality, he might have got away with it, but a billion dollars is such a ridiculously large amount of money that he couldn't use them. Some people did believe they were genuine, but couldn't accept them, because the notes were too large to be negotiable. And as soon as Zigetta took one to a bank, the staff realised it was a fake and he was arrested. If he'd put fewer zeros on the end, he'd probably still be free. Greed is a terrible thing."

Zigetta faces up to 15 years in prison when sentenced in June. *(San Francisco Chronicle, 14/3/06. Spotter: Brian Rowlands)*



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo,

And my apologies if I'm a little brief this week, but I've just got so much to do at the moment that I've hardly got time to write this newsletter!

Unlike some people who seem to have all day to sit around writing stupid articles about me for the local paper!

Not mentioning any names, Mr Clarke! But fancy saying that I had bungled the reshuffle of my new-look PCC, just because when the music stopped there wasn't a chair left for him!

If I did "bungle" anything (which of course I didn't!), it was giving "Dumbo" a job in the first place!

No disrespect, Big-Ears, but you couldn't even shave properly, let alone run the Neighbourhood Watch!

Something even Mr Blunkett could do, and he can't even see! (No disrespect, David!)

But that brings me to all the new initiatives I've launched in the last week alone, to show how incredibly busy I am!

Who says I've run out of ideas, when I've come up with these ten brilliant ideas only this morning?

- Replacing the church's old-fashioned oil-fired boiler with a new state-of-the-art nuclear reactor in the crypt at only four times the cost! And, what's more, it's green!
- All foreigners in the parish to be sent home at once (except of course the ones we're not allowed to deport, which apparently is all of them!).
- The Mission to St Gerry's in Northern Ireland to be reopened, so that we can close it down if it doesn't work! And we won't pay anyone either, unless they agree to work with each other rather than burn down the mission hut as per usual! Somebody's got to bang heads together to stop the violence, and I suppose it'll have to be yours truly! "If you want something done, ask a busy man to do it" (*Book Of Chestnuts 4.16*).

I could go on filling the whole of this newsletter with my new ideas! But I haven't

got time to tell you about them all at the moment, because I'm far too busy putting them into practice!

I talk the talk, but I also walk the walk, as my friend the Rev Dubya of the Church of the Latter-Day Morons once so memorably put it!

And, while I'm on the subject of my new PCC, has anyone made a better start than Mrs Beckett, in her new job as Parish Outreach Co-ordinator, visiting the Rev Dubya in Washington to be told what to do!

Her lovely orange trouser suit really showed the lack of dress sense of poor old Sister Condi, who looked really drab in her black nun's outfit!

I can't imagine what Mr Straw saw in her! In fact, I don't mind admitting that it was lack of judgement that led me to demote him to his new role of putting out the hymn books on Sundays! (No offence, Jack – it's a very important job which I am sure you will do supremely well!)

So, that's all I have time for this week! But just one more thing!

I want to wish our boys all the very best in the World Cup! I shall be supporting them all the way, because I am English – unlike Mr Brown who is, of course, Scottish and has no idea of the meaning of the word "loyalty"! (No offence, Gordon, but leave the football to those who know about it!)

So go out there and score lots of runs, lads!

Yours loyally,

Tony

(In the Number 10 Shirt for a long time to come!)

A Clarification

I was delighted not to be invited to Mr Beckham's football party over the weekend as I am far too busy ruining the parish *(surely "running" Ed)*. Moreover I have not taken offence in the slightest at Mr Beckham's rudeness and ingratitude and as the young people say I am really "not bovverred"!!! So good luck to everyone in the squad except David and let's hope he doesn't break his metatarsal or get sent off in the first match! T.B.

Parish Postbag

Dear Vicar

You specifically asked me to look into corruption in the parish and yet when I deliver my report you

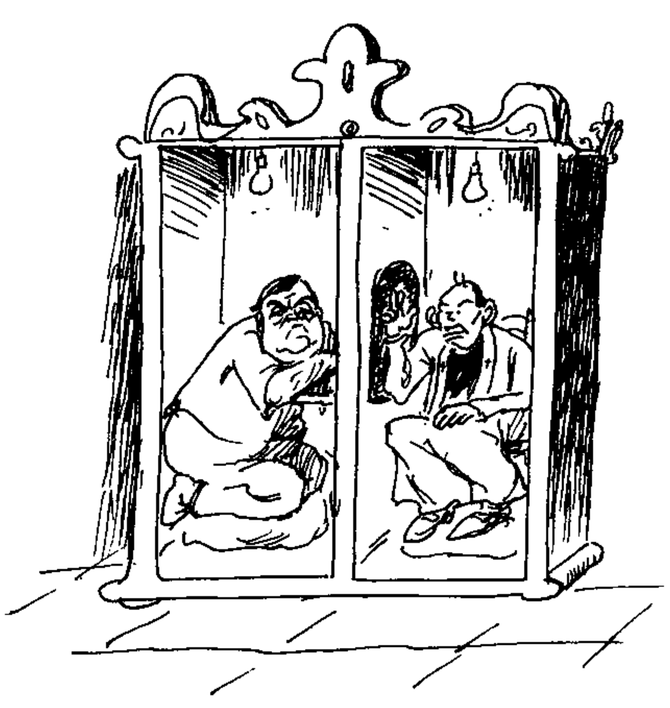
Yours sincerely

Alastair Graham,

The Sleazefinder General

STAND-UP COMEDY IN THE PARISH

There was a splendid turnout in the Tesco Parish Hall to see Mr Prescott make his debut as a stand-up comedian. Some of the ladies present might have found the material a little "blue"! But, from his opening joke ("You see they've put me in charge of domestic affairs!") to his sign-off gag ("I'm still very much on the job!"), he had the audience rolling in the aisles, especially when he tried to pretend that he was making a serious speech!! T.B.



The Vicar absolves Mr Prescott of all his sins (not that he's committed any)! As seen by local artist Mr de la Nougerede.

Our Core Values

The Vicar writes:

There's been a lot of talk around the parish recently about those "core values" which sum up everything that St Albion's stands for.

When I'm asked, "Vicar, these core values you're always going on about, what are they?" (usually by our friend in Tesco, when he's managed to corner me by the new Polish salted herring, cabbage and sour cream counter), I always reply: "Decency, fairness, tolerance, decency and fairness."

But it's more than this. In fact, for the benefit of all those foreign friends who are so keen to come to live and work in St Albion's, can we try to paint in our mind's eye a picture of all that this parish stands for in our hearts and lives? What about warm beer, cricket, old maids being mugged on their way to evensong, the sound of peerages being bought and sold on a sunny afternoon...

I'm sure all of you will have your own image of all that is best in St Albion's life, which I'd like you to share with me and our parish team, so that we can set in place a "Core Values Template", to be incorporated into the curriculum of our new Al Qaeda Faith Academy (former St Albion's Primary School).

All contributions gratefully received on the vicarage website (when it is back up and running – thanks Accenture!) **www.coreval.co.uk**

HOME OFFICE WORKER HAD NO RIGHT TO BE THERE

By Our Political Staff **Peter O'Bore**

A 65-YEAR-OLD Scotsman with a communist record was found working in the Home Office last week. Mr Reid had no papers and no qualifications but claimed he had been given the job "because there was no one else".

Mr Reid has had a number of jobs in the last five years since he entered the country from his native Scotland. He once had a temporary job working in hospitals and even had a sensitive post in a defence related office.

As soon as the mistake was discovered, nothing was done. Mr Reid was allowed to continue to come in and work provided he made no attempt to "tidy up the mess".

Said a spokesperson, "We have no idea how many Scotsmen there are in Westminster but estimates suggest anything between two or three thousand or maybe fifteen or maybe none at all. We have no idea about anything" said the spokesman.

Those Tiny Minorities In Full

A Government Spokesman's Guide

■ The thousands of people given false criminal records by the Home Office computer. *"All the rest of the records are fine."*

■ The thousands of rapists paedophiles and murderers at large in the country. *"The vast majority of the population are law abiding."*

■ The hundred-plus servicemen killed in Iraq. *"Many more are still alive."*

Nursery Times

May 26, 2006

PUDDLEDUCK AND GRUNT TO SPLIT SHOCK

by **Beatrix Harry Poter**

JEMIMA PUDDLE-DUCK was said to be in tears today when it was revealed that she and her pig-about-town lover, Hugh Grunt, had decided to go their separate ways.

Puddleduck, the daughter of the late man-eating shark, Sir Jammy Fishpaste, was formerly married to the dashing Imran Fox, but their relationship also foundered.

Jemima is said to have told farmyard friends that "Grunt has a problem with commitment. He likes to roam about chatting up the chicks, but does not want to have any eggs, let alone sit on them."

Grunt is said to be "working hard" on his new film *Babe III* in which the pig goes on holiday to Barbardos.

Lady Annabel Puddleduck was philosophical, "Jemima is still a beautiful duck and there are plenty of fish in the sea if you have run out of foxes and pigs".

COURT CIRCULAR

Beckingham Palace, Saturday

His Royal Highness the Earl of Beckham and Lady Poshina Beckswell were delighted to hold a reception in honour of the National Association Football Team. They received the following distinguished guests.

1st Limo

Sir Spudface Nipper and Lady De Rooney

2nd Limo

Sir Oswald Osbore, Lady Sharonita Osbore and the Hon Kelly Osbore.

1st Stretch Limo

Sir Gordon Ramsay of Fuckington; Lady Cocaina Moss of that Priory; Dame Elton and Lady John; Baroness Hurley of the Front page of the Daily Telegraph; Sir Robbington Williams; Sir Fredswell Flinstone and Lady Flinstone.

1st Minicab

The Duchess Fergiana of Weight-Watchers and her daughter Princess Fergianella

1st Pram

Master Theo Walcott

1st Gatecrasher (on bicycle)

David "Dave" Cameron, the guest of Dame Rebekkah Filth.

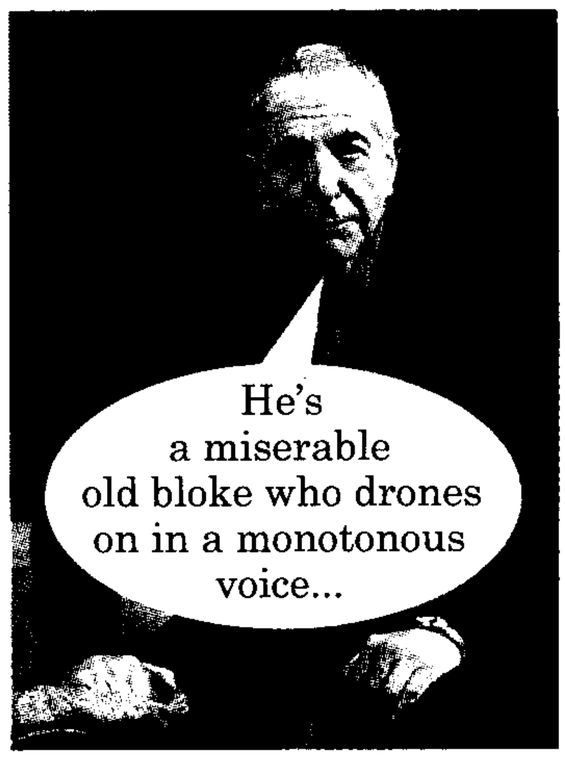
(That's enough distinguished guests Ed)

WETTEST DROUGHT SINCE RECORDS BEGAN

MILLIONS of home-owners were drowning yesterday in the torrential droughts that are threatening to wash away the whole of the South-East of the Country.

(Reuters)

LEONARD COHEN 'A PRINCE CHARLES FAN' SHOCK



What You Won't Read In The Sun

THE Sun

Ross Kemp is Great! It's official! p94

LOVESICK OLD FOOL CONNED BY RUTHLESS GOLDDIGGER

by Rebekah Filth

A RICH elderly billionaire has been taken to the cleaners by a scheming fortune hunter who is young enough to be his daughter.

Yes, poor 93-year-old Rupert Murdoch, known as "Mucker" because of the filth he prints in his newspapers, fell hopelessly in love with Wendy Dung, the ambitious, scheming two-legged temptress from the land of Egg Fried Rice.

When I'm 94

Within minutes of the wedding bells ringing out, the Dirty Gold Digger was up the duff and making a claim on Mucker's media millions.

■ THE SUN SAYS

How stupid can you get, Mucker?

She even made you do strenuous oriental yoga to try and kill you off and get her hands on your *(cont p.94)*

GLENDA SLAGG

FLEET STREET'S NUMBER ONE HIT GIRL!!!?!

■ **SHED A tear for poor, sad Macca as his world crumbles apart!?! Here's a young mop-haired Scouser who's kept our feet a-dancin' and a-prancin' with his magical matchless melodies from yesteryear. But when it came to love, Cupid's arrow missed the Merseyside maestro by a mile!?!? Our hearts go out as one to the lovelorn lyricist from Liverpool, who gave us such unforgettable hits as *(subs – fill in names of unforgettable hits please!).* We love you, Macca – even if she doesn't!?!?!?!**

■ PAUL McCARTNEY!?!?!? You'd have to have a heart of stone not to larf!?!? The only one who couldn't see what was coming to him was the randy old goat himself!?!! There's no fool like an old fool, they say?!??!! And now you've proved them right with a capital 'R'!!?! Tell you what, Macca. You might be sad. But we're not – we're laughing our heads off!!?!!

■ **SHED A tear for poor, sad Heather Mills, the feisty lass who came from nowhere to become Britain's First Lady of Pop!?!! Selfless and warm-hearted, she gave him everything – and rescued him from a lonely old age, just when he needed it most!!?! And now the dream has ended. All you needed was love, love, love!!?! And all you got in return was hate, hate, hate!!?! You'd need a heart of stone not to weep for Macca's Mournful Madonna today!!?!!**

■ HEATHER MILLS!?!?!? Aren'tcha-sickofher???!? So Macca's finally woken up to the fact that her real name is "Little Miss Gold-Digger 2006"!!?! Come off it, Heather!!? The only thing that attracted you was the size of his bank balance!!!?! You saw a vacancy for "Lady Macca" and you got the job!?! More like "Lady Muck", if you ask me!!?! You may have fooled Macca, but you haven't fooled Auntie Glenda!!?! So take your money and hop it!?!?! (Geddit?!!?)

■ *LINDA McCARTNEY!!? Don'tcha-missher?!? I know at the time I said she was a loopy vegetarian who couldn't sing and looked like the back end of a bus!!!?! But compared to the present Mrs Macca, lovely Linda shines out like a candle in the wind?!! All together now – "Lady McCartney, children at your feet..."*

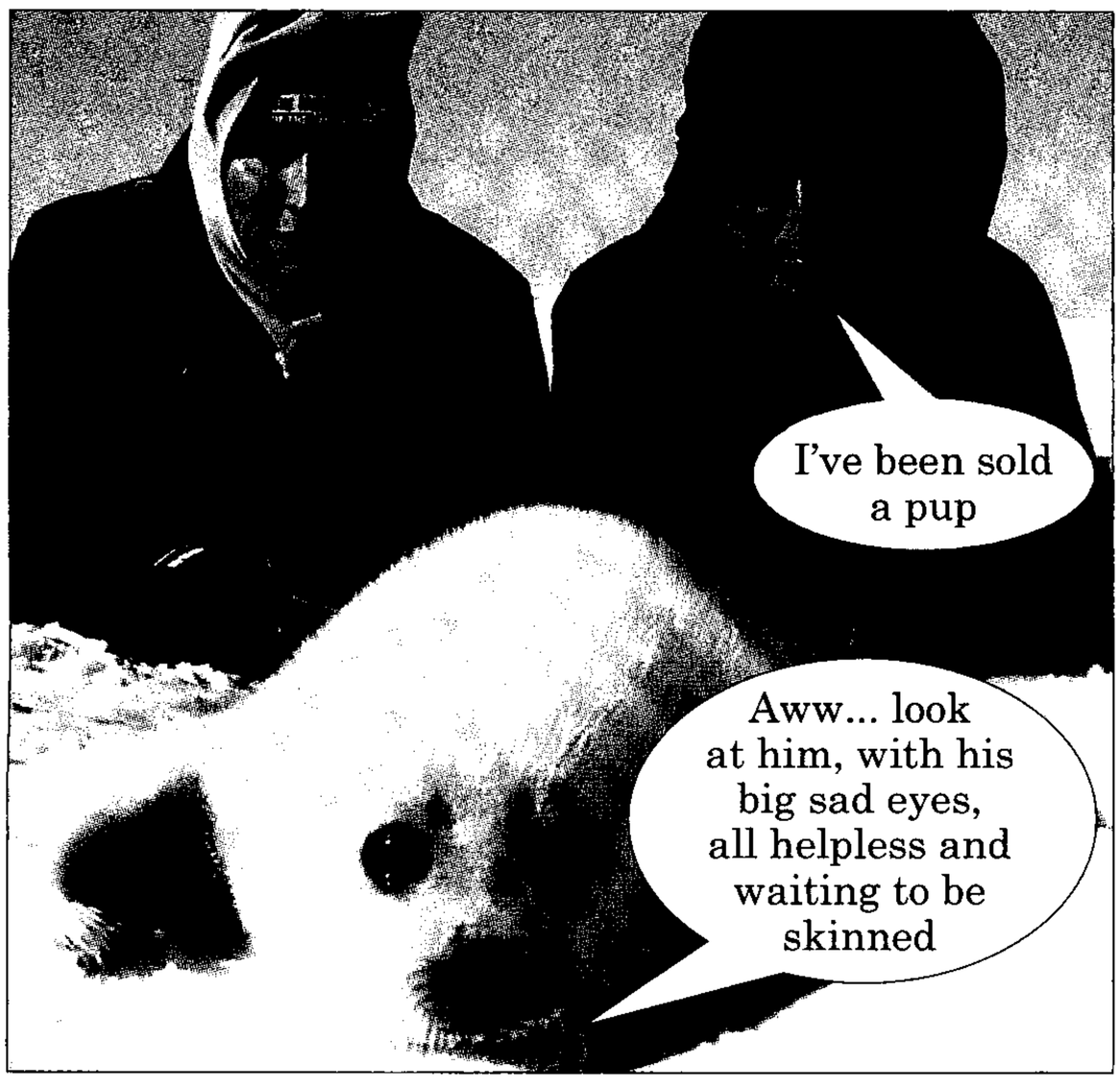
■ HERE THEY are – Glenda's Maypole Munchies!

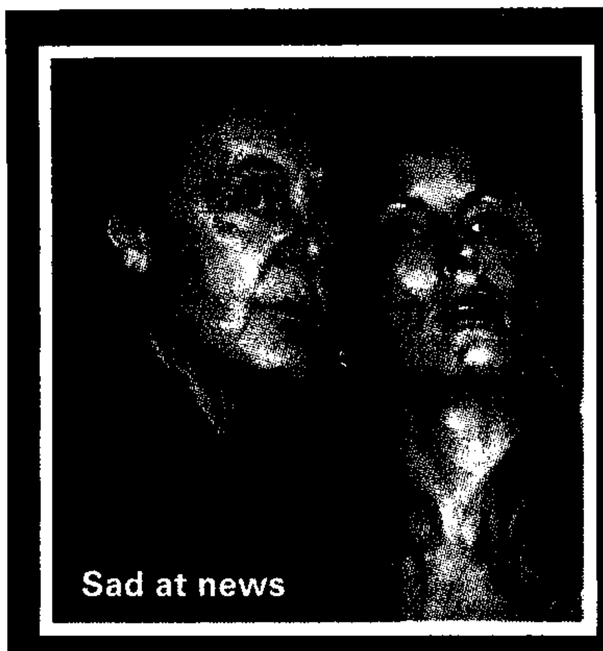
● **Thierry Henry!!?!** OK, so he' didn't score in Paris but he can have a second chance round at my place!!?!

● **Tom Hanks?!??** OK, so you're stiff and boring!!?! I don't mind as long as you forget the boring bit!!?? Geddit??!!

● **Mahmoud Ahmedinajad!!?!** Crazy name, completely crazy guy!!?!

Byeeee!!!




Sad at news

IT'S ALL OVER!

Love Split Shocks World

A Nation Mourns

By Our Showbiz Staff John, Paul, George and Ring O'Booze

THE greatest romance of modern times is finished

That was the shock news from Downing Street yesterday when a tearful spokesman confirmed that, after nine years, two weeks and three days, Gordon and Tony have agreed to part.

Said a close friend of the couple, "This is a tragedy, but they just can't live under the same roof any more.

Satanic Mills

"The rows have got worse and worse. The problem is that Gordon became jealous of Tony's fame and good looks.

"Gordon wanted to be a star in his own right – not just to be known as Tony's other half."

Unlucky Heather

In recent months, friends have noticed that the couple have spent more time apart, with Gordon constantly flying off to Africa to promote his charity causes.

Another close friend admitted, "Tony has obviously been under a lot of stress, even bursting into tears on occasion."

"The trouble is," said yet another close friend, "is that Tony can't handle getting older and not being the wonder kid at No. 1 as he was all those years ago."

Mug of Kintyre

"It's all a far cry," said one more of these close friends that we keep inventing, "from that first magical moment when their eyes met over a restaurant table in a trendy Islington restaurant.

"Tony promised Gordon the earth," continued this friend. "The pair became inseperable, and it looked as though their love would last forever."

"But now," chipped several more of these hundreds of close friends "the dream has shattered and Gordon is demanding £800 billion from taxpayers as his share of the settlement."

Paul McCartney

How They Aren't Related Any More

His Money

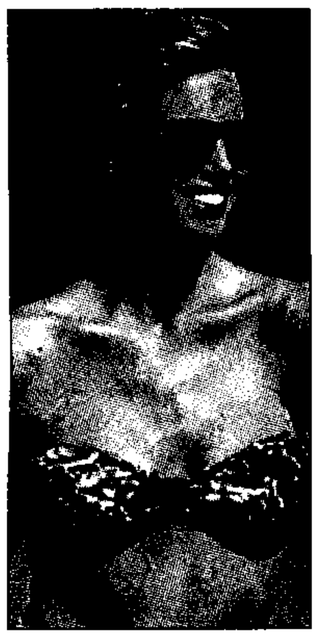
Could This Be The Most Expensive Divorce Ever?

MILLIONS of lawyers danced openly in the streets yesterday, at the thought of getting a share in what promises to be the most lucrative bonanza the divorce courts have ever witnessed.

Said one lawyer, who had camped on the pavement outside the law courts, "Of course, this is a very sad day for everyone. But not for us. Don't get me wrong, we are not gold-diggers. We just want to make as much money as *(cont. Court 94)*

SIX TO WATCH IN THE WORLD CUP

Noleen McCleavage, 19. Gorgeous, pouting ex-tracksuit model. Noleen is looking forward to eating hamburgers in Hamburg with her fiancé, Shane Wayney (Liverpool United).



Shelley Blondie, 22. Gorgeous, pouting one-time Miss Chorleywood (2001). Shelley is a high-flying dental assistant who is looking forward to shopping in Munich's fashionable HitlerPlatz shopping precinct. Girlfriend of Rio Tinto-Zinc (Bolton Albion).

Michelle Totty, 28. Fiery, gorgeous, pouting former RyanAir flight attendant who is looking forward to sampling the bier kellers of downtown Dusseldorf. Ex-wife of Sebastian Wright-Wheatcroft (Tottenham Wanderers) and current girlfriend of his cousin Damien Dancona (Chelsea City).

Karen Bikini, 23. Thai-born, gorgeous, pouting masseuse who is looking forward to networking with the tired football managers of Stuttgart. Partner of Jermaine Greer (West Bromwich Wednesday) and mother of some of his children.

Debbie Shagwell, 17. Chigwell-born, gorgeous, pouting, phew! What a scorcher! Blimey! *(That's enough Six To Watch. Ed.)*

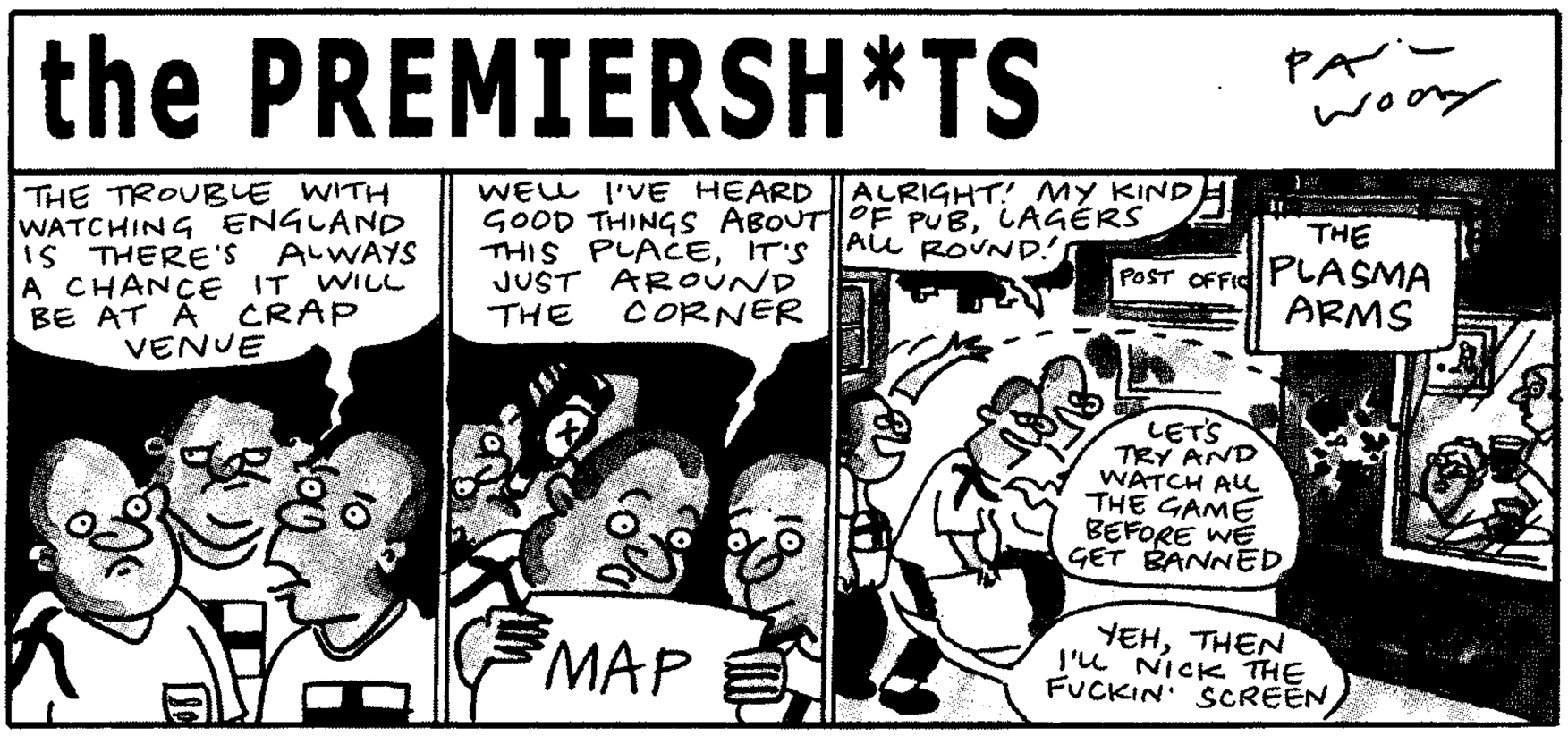
DEMAND FOR POWER SHARING AGREEMENT

UNIONIST and Loyalist politicians, meeting at Stormont for the first day of the reconvened Northern Ireland Assembly, have again called on Tony Blair and Gordon Brown to come to a power-sharing agreement.

by Our Northern Ireland Correspondent **Sam Tex**

"We have given Blair and Brown the deadline of November for the political deadlock to end," said one senior Unionist politician. "If they can't agree to abide by this time-table, then the political stalemate will destroy the Government."

Gerry Adams and Rev. Ian Paisley issued a joint statement urging the two men to put the hatreds of the past behind them and to sit down together to find a way through their differences.


the PREMIERSH*TS
PAT WOOD
THE TROUBLE WITH WATCHING ENGLAND IS THERE'S ALWAYS A CHANCE IT WILL BE AT A CRAP VENUE
WELL I'VE HEARD GOOD THINGS ABOUT THIS PLACE, IT'S JUST AROUND THE CORNER
MAP
ALRIGHT! MY KIND OF PUB, LAGERS ALL ROUND!
POST OFFIC
THE PLASMA ARMS
LET'S TRY AND WATCH ALL THE GAME BEFORE WE GET BANNED
YEH, THEN I'LL NICK THE FUCKIN' SCREEN

BLAIR ATTACKS HIMSELF

by Our Political Staff **Peter O'Bore**

A FURIOUS Prime Minister hit out today at the human rights legislation, which he described as "political correctness gone mad" and "a threat to the British way of life".

He continued: "Whoever brought in this badly-thought-out, shoddy and dangerous piece of legislation should be sacked."

When it was pointed out that it was he himself who had brought in the Act, he said: "You can't sack me. It's a breach of my human rights."

OLD COMEDY FAVOURITE TO CONTINUE

FANS of broad comedy, cheap farce and old wince-making material were delighted yesterday as plans were unveiled to produce yet another in the long-running series of "Carry On..." films. The latest offering, "Carry On Regardless", tells the story of a crazy, madcap bunch of hopeless, hapless Cabinet ministers, as they struggle to get even the simplest job done! As Tony Blair says, "Infamy, Infamy, the entire country's got it in for me!"

Rated: Not very highly

Cast

Tony Blair ..... Sid James
Cherie Blair ..... Fenella Fielding
Gordon Brown ..... Bernard Bresslaw
John Prescott ..... Terry Scott
Tracey Temple ..... Barbara Windsor
Charles Clarke ..... Hattie Jacques
David Blunkett ..... Jack Douglas
Ruth Kelly ..... Jim Dale
Jack Straw ..... Charles Hawtrey
Tessa Jowell ..... Joan Sims

NEW OLD SAYINGS

"A spoonful of Sugar makes you turn the television off"

POLLY FILLER

SO it's official! Working mothers are fitter, healthier and slimmer than stay-at-home puddings who spend all their time eating cakes and watching Noel Edmonds!

This comes as no surprise to yours truly, who has been juggling the tightrope of modern motherhood, successful relationships and a high-flying career writing best-sellers, for years! Just dip into *Mummy For Old Tightrope* (Tyrell and Pearson £19.99), *The Curse Of The Yummy Mummy!* (Johnson and Johnson £29.99) or *Nanny Is The Root Of All Evil – A Sideways Look At Hopeless Girls From Somalia!* (Useless Simon and Shuster £39.99) and you'll see why I've got a figure to die for! (And I don't just mean sales of my latest book – no. 94 on Amazon, thanks for asking!)

NO, we working media mums know full well that the best way to lose weight and look great is to use up thousands of calories shouting at the au-pair for putting toddler Charlie's microwaveable Narnia character chicken nuggets in the dishwasher!! (A hilarious anecdote in all my books, but not so funny for poor Famina who got sent back to the remains of her village with a flea in her ear and a bill for £3.99 for the ruined nuggets!!)

And who needs the gym when you have to run up the stairs every night to tell your useless partner to stop watching Richard Hammond's *World of Exploding Toilets* on Sky Desperate 6 and go and do Charlie's prep! You're obviously too busy yourself, writing an amusing account of how stay-at-home dumplings are even fatter than the cakes they eat all day whilst watching Noel Edmonds!

So the recipe is pretty obvious, isn't it, sisters? As I said to our ditsy new girl, Hunga from Zimbabwe, only this morning, "Work more and eat less!"

© Polly Filler 2006.

Simon Kelner – Guest Frontman for U2

by Our Media Staff **Jane Thynne-Stuff** of the *Independent on Sunday Bloody Sunday*

THE charismatic editor Simon Kelner, wearing his trademark goatee beard, took over the little-known rock group U2 in a bold experiment to make people look at the Irish band "in a different light".

Kelner was quick to stamp his mark on U2, with an immediate change of format. "It's now half the size and will be called U1," he said. Kelner then insisted that all the songs were about Iraq and the album covers should no longer have photographs on them, but instead should only feature lists of boring numbers, preferably about the Iraq war. As a final gesture, he demanded that the Independent cartoonist, Sally Ann Lasson, should join the band "because she is my wife".

"This isn't just a gimmick," said Kelner. "We're going to make Poverty of Ideas history".

NUCLEAR OPTION CONDEMNED

by Our Tehran Correspondent **Mahmoud Ahmageddon**

THE Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad today demanded that the UN meet in an emergency session, as he attacked plans by the British Prime Minister Tony Blair to step up his country's nuclear programme.

"We cannot let someone as dangerous and unstable as Blair, who is a pariah in his own country, resume his nuclear programme," warned *(cont. p.94)*

Late News

REID HITS OUT

THE NEW Home Secretary John Reid today laid the blame for the current Labour Government firmly at the feet of the last Conservative Government.

"But for their total incompetence, there is no way that we would still be in power today," said the Home *(cont. p. 94)*

PENSIONS LINK

DOWNING STREET has confirmed that Tony Blair has struck a deal with his publisher that will mean, on his retirement from Number 10 next year, he'll have re-established a link between memoirs and earnings.

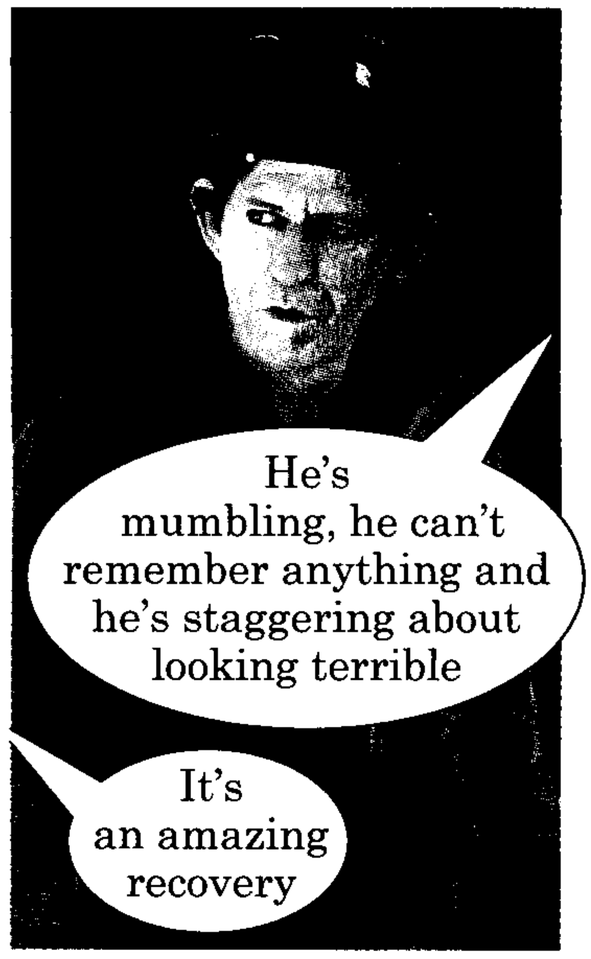
"Tony believes that re-establishing the link between memoirs and earnings has to be a priority," said a publishing spokesman, "as it'll be worth millions to the decidedly average Prime Minister, and will go a long way to eradicating the crippling mortgage repayments on his central London home."

CATHOLIC OUTRAGE

THE Catholic Archbishop of Westminster's press secretary, Steven Noon, has spoken of his astonishment after being sacked for being homosexual.

"I was always aware that being gay in this job wasn't an option, it's just that I rather assumed that it was compulsory," said a bemused *(cont. p. 94)*

KEITH RICHARDS BRAIN OPERATION



THE TURNER PRIZE IS HERE AGAIN – Who Cares?
pp. 8, 10, 12, 20, 26, 34

DA VINCI CODE FILM LAUNCHES – Why Should Anyone Take Notice Of This Rubbish?
pp. 6-7, 18-24, 30-36 etc.

PAUL AND HEATHER – Why can't people leave them alone?
pp. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6-94 etc.

THE NEXT issue of Private Eye will be guest edited by the well known rock star and charity worker, Sir Cliff Richard. Sir Cliff will dedicate his issue of the Eye to causes close to his heart and there will be an emphasis on the crisis of Summer Holidays, the plight of Bachelor Boys, and the problems of Living Dolls. Sir Clifford writes in his editorial, "I have long been an admirer of Private Eye but I have to say its tone is often negative. I shall be trying to redress this with a more celebratory tone. So congratulations and celebrations, I'd like the world to know I'm happy as can be *(cont p.94)*

This Film Could Destroy The Church

Reveals BORIS JOHNSON

CRIPES! Blimey! Apparently, there's this film which proves that Jesus had lots of kids, and that many of his descendants are still alive today. Possibly including you, readers! And even me. Well, strike a light. As we all know, it was the 4th-Century Gnostic Bishop Borisius, founder of the Gnomic heresy, who first came up with this old chestnut at the Council of Davinci in 425BC. As we Greek speakers put it – Was Jesus *homoeroticus* or *homoldetonius?* But it was not until Hollywood really looked into it that the whole bally cover-up was finally *(continued 94 BCE)*

"Out with the lads converting heathens, my eye! I'll wager you were off changing water into wine again... When are you going to change something useful, like a baby's nappy, Mr High-and-Mighty?"

Why Jesus Would Never Have Married And Had Children...

MASTERMIND

John Humphrys: Your name?

Contestant: David Roberts.

Humphrys: And your job?

Contestant: I am the Director of Enforcement and Removals at the Immigration and Nationality Directorate at the Home Office.

Humphrys: And your special subject is?

Contestant: The deportation of undesirable aliens from the UK between 1990 and 2006.

Humphrys: Mr Roberts, you have two minutes, starting now. How many illegal immigrants are there currently in the UK?

Contestant: I haven't the faintest idea.

Humphrys: How many illegal immigrants have been deported since 1990?

Contestant: Nope, haven't the foggiest.

Humphrys: How many illegal immigrants have been identified as murderers, rapists or child murderers since 2005?

Contestant: No good asking me, old boy. It must be on the internet somewhere.

Humphrys: Do you have any idea of anything that's going on in your department?

Contestant: Shouldn't think so.

Humphrys: What would you say if you saw an illegal immigrant with a criminal record trying to get through the barrier at Heathrow?

Contestant: Pass! Ha, ha ha!

(Buzzer goes to indicate time is up)

Humphrys: You scored no points, and one pass.

Contestant: Does that mean I win?

Humphrys: No.

Contestant: Oh well, I only entered because I've got nothing to do at work.

(Silly music. Ends)

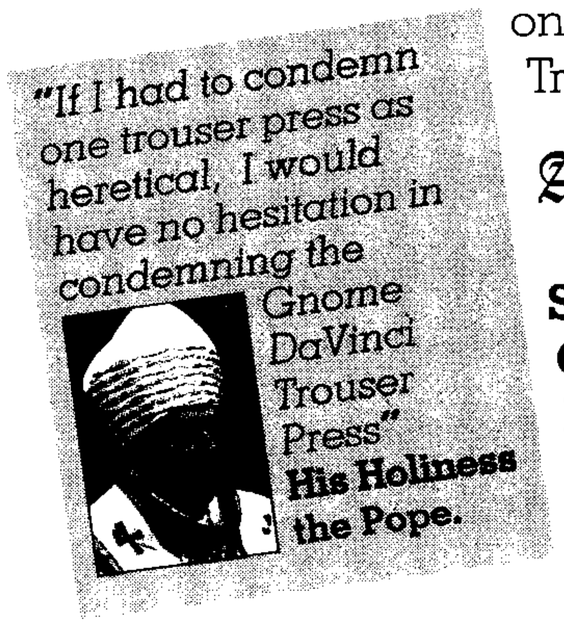
NEW FROM GNOME

The DaVinci TROUSER PRESS

RELIVE all the thrills of the blockbuster film of the book of the millennium with the Trouser Press that Christ's descendants would have used if he had fathered a child and gone to live in Boulogne!

ENJOY the biggest mystery of the last 2000 years whilst steaming your favourite trousers, just as all the Knights Templars have done from Galileo to Michelangelo to Wayne Rooney.

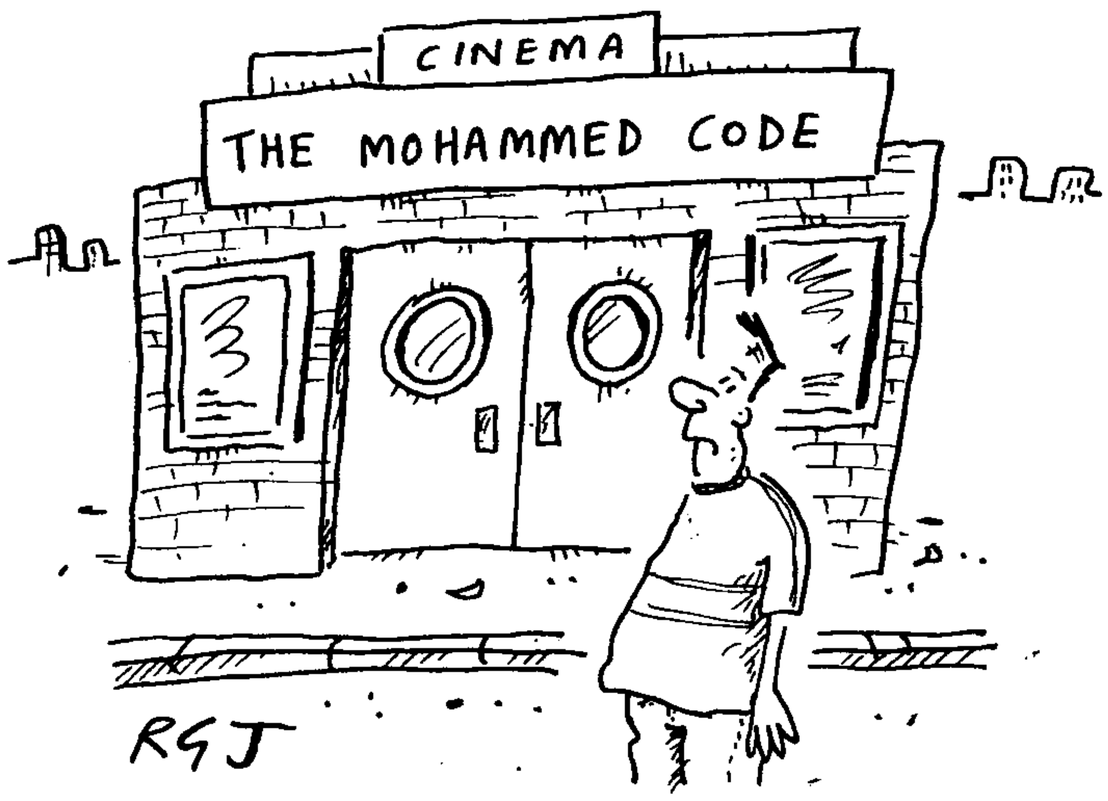
PLUS! Can you solve this mystic code that has been handed down by the secretive Brothers of Corby for generations and which is inscribed on each and every Trouser Press?


"If I had to condemn one trouser press as heretical, I would have no hesitation in condemning the Gnome DaVinci Trouser Press"
His Holiness the Pope.

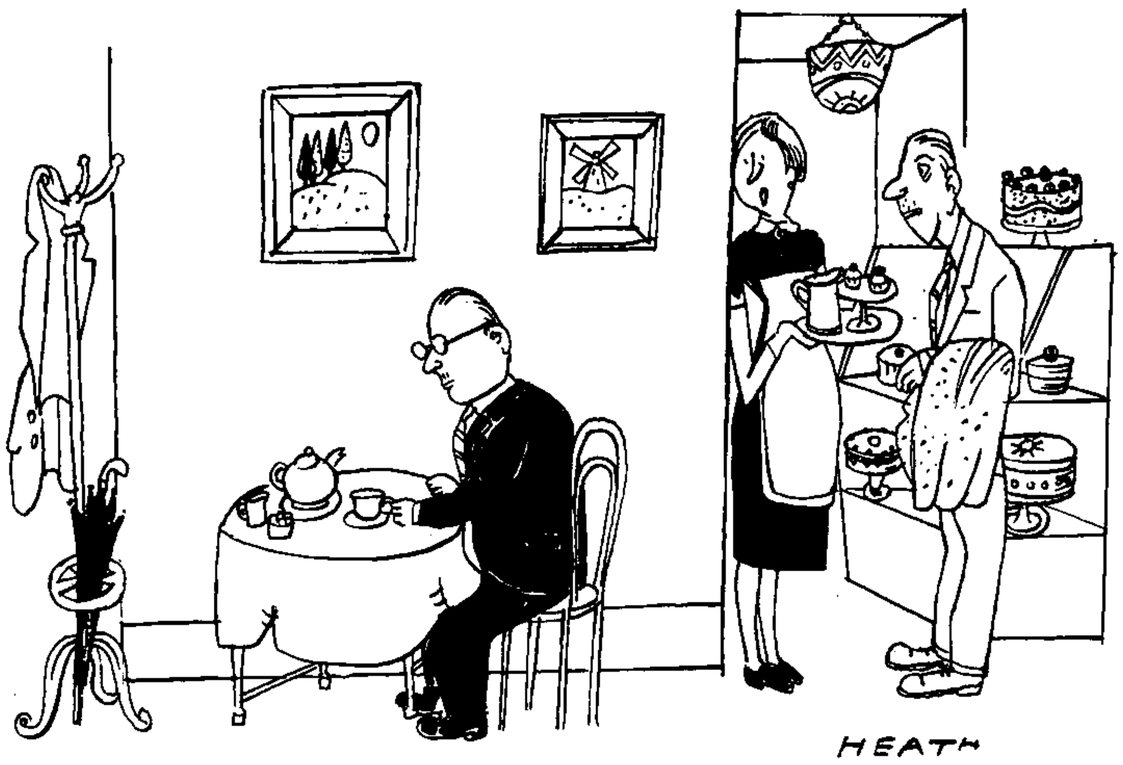
A Mad Nine Wait*

Send £666 now to:
Gnome Trouser Press Offer
The Trading Estate
Crawley.

*Made in Taiwan



Hollywood Movies You Won't See



"He's fighting his inner demons!"

NEW FUEL SOURCE PROMISES BRIGHT FUTURE FOR BRITAIN

by Our Energy Staff **John Cole**

BRITAIN's energy future has been transformed by the discovery of an astonishing new fuel, which can be put to a whole range of uses, from heating homes to generating electricity in power stations.

A top government scientist told the Eye, "It's black, it comes out of the ground, and Britain has billions of tons of the stuff – enough to keep us warm for hundreds of years.

"What's more," he went on, "compared to, say, oil, nuclear power or wind farms, this miracle substance is very cheap.

"We've decided to call it 'coal'. It will be extracted from deep holes in the ground, by teams of men who will be known as 'miners'."

A 183-year-old Yorkshireman, Arthur Scargill, told the Eye, "If they try to open any of these pits, I will call on my members to come out on strike."

WATER COMPANIES' NEW WARNING

by Our Drought Staff **Stan Pipe**

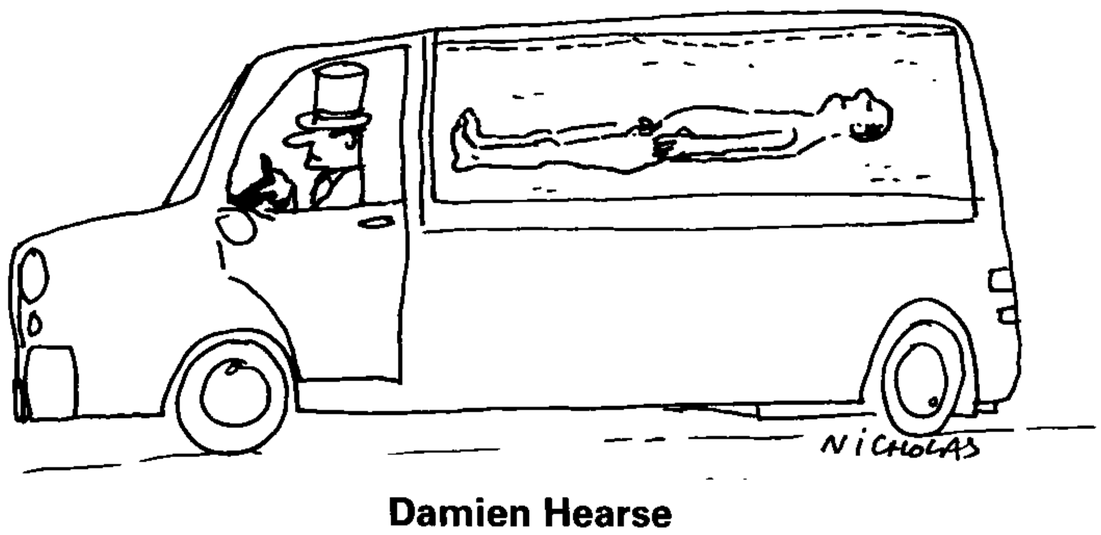
WATER companies were warning customers last night that the reservoirs of money were "not as full as they would like".

Said a spokesman, "Normally we have lakes full of cash, buckets full of the stuff sloshing around everywhere, but this year we've taken so much out in dividends that our stocks are severely depleted."

Customers are being urged to save money and not waste it needlessly on non-essentials.

Hosepipe Bank

"Use as little money as possible this summer," reads a new nationwide campaign, "because you'll need it to pay your enormous water bill later in the year."



Damien Hearse

CORRUPTION BARS ENTRY TO EU

by Our Brussels Staff **Hans Intill**

THE EU last night slammed the door on its latest two would-be members, Bulgaria and Romania, on the grounds that they failed to meet the EU's "corruption criteria".

Said an EU spokesman, Piotr Mandelssohn, "We have very strict rules about this kind of thing, and I'm afraid our Bulgarian and Romanian friends have fallen seriously short.

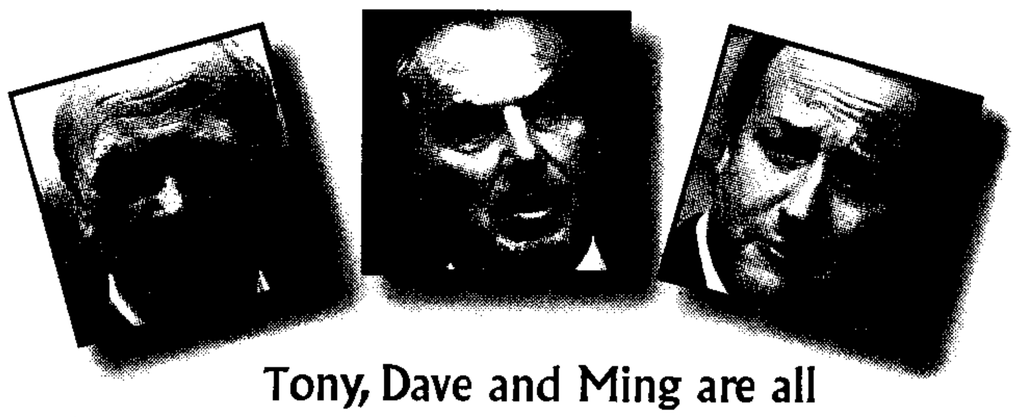
"We accept," he said, "that they are both very corrupt, but until they can match the degree of corruption shown by Chirac's France, Berlusconi's Italy and Blair's Britain, there can be no hope of them being given entry."

LATE NEWS

Nigeria and Somalia to join EU.

CHRISTIAN AID WEEK

Give – And Give Generously!!!



Tony, Dave and Ming are all the victims of a terrible shortage of money which has recently hit Britain's politicians.

Their traditional sources of income have dried up, virtually overnight, thanks to a change in the climate, not to mention investigations by police.

There is only one way that these three unhappy men (one of them an elderly Chinaman) can hope to survive this cruel downturn in their fortunes.

That is if you, the great British public, rally around and dig deep to provide the funds they so desperately need.

- **£10,000 will buy a nice new tie and haircut**
- **£250,000 will buy a new specially-equipped 'battle bus'**
- **£1,000,000 will buy a peak-time TV election broadcast, produced by Bargleby, Bowtie and Glasses.**
- **£2 million will buy you a peerage** (*shurely shome mishtake? WD*)

Just send donations at once to the Party Funding Account, the Inland Revenue. Failure to pay on time could result in imprisonment or death.

By order J. STRAW

Leader of the House of Commons and Minister for Lords Reform and State Funding for Political Parties.

BAGHDAD: The Iraqi prime minister-designate, Nuri al-Maliki, said Thursday that he hoped to form a government within a week after meeting two of Iraq's most powerful clerics, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.

International Herald Tribune

DIARY

SIR JOHN MORTIMER: It's frightfully depressing, isn't it? We really are in the worst situation we've ever been in. Absolutely dire. Champagne's gone through the roof, and now we're being told there's going to be a hosepipe ban! The one I always liked was that sweet little Welshman, what was his name? That's right – Ned Kinnock! Super! If only Tony had appointed Ned as Chancellor, then he'd have done all the right sums – he's simply marvellous not just at adding up but at long division too, as long as he has his pocket calculator and the country would be in a really lovely position now. As it is, the ground's awfully muddy at the moment, with puddles everywhere. And when you think how glorious it was on that May morning when they were elected! Frightfully depressing. Care for a top-up, anyone?

HEATHER MILLS McCARTNEY: Gordon's a lovely, lovely guy. We're great friends, and have been ever since we went on a top-secret Arctic expedition together, just the two of us bivouacking under the tropical stars. They say Gordon's the Chancellor but that shows how much they know, doesn't it? To be honest he leaves most of the important decisions to me. He always says I have the looks, ability and communication skills that make me a natural for the job. "And the main thing is, you really CARE, Heather," he said to me when we had dinner together last night with Nelson Mandela and Her Majesty the Queen at a hideaway. Gordon's told me that a few months after he gets to Number 10, he plans to hand over to me. He's like an older brother to me. Or a husband. In fact he recently asked me to marry him and I said I'd think about it. If anyone denies it, I'll sue and give my winnings to my charities.

LORD REES-MOGG: Some suggest that Gordon Brown will be the next Prime Minister, but I confess to taking the contrary view. It now seems inevitable that the next Prime Minister will be John Prescott. He has proved an immensely able Deputy to Mr Blair, he has an unblemished record of public service and he has the intellectual equipment necessary for the task. Furthermore, he is hugely popular among the Labour rank-and-file, and he and his wife Pauline are well known at Westminster for enjoying the happiest of marriages.

TONY OR GORDON? A SYMPOSIUM

HAROLD PINTER: You can shove your bomb
Up your fucking arse, Blair.
But don't come running to me, chum
When you wake up one morning
To find it's given you
Constipation.

DENIS HEALEY: When I was Prime Minister and Jim Callaghan was my Chancellor, we had inflation down to zero, everyone had a good job and a lovely home, no-one died in our hospitals, and ordinary folk spent their free time dancing in the streets and ambling in and out of each other's houses bearing delicious stews and bunches of the most glorious flowers. Tony's totally ruined all that. Everyone's utterly miserable now. The sooner Gordon takes over, the better. And if he takes my advice, he'll be there for the foreseeable future.

BOB DYLAN: The river flows, and keeps flowin'. And having flown, it flows again. There's no rhyme or reason, my friend, but that's just the way that rivers flow. What is in the river is not river but water, but it's not just the water that flows, but the river too.

BOB GELDOF: Blair has won three fockin elections in a fockin row. Fock off to those fockin fockers who say he's a fockin wanker. But why the fock hasn't he pulled his finger out of his arse and done fockin more for the Third World? Know what? The guy's a fockin wanker.

PATRICIA HEWITT: If you'll just let me FINISH. Gordon believes Tony to be a TRULY EXCELLENT Prime Minister, and in turn Tony believes Gordon is a TRULY EXCELLENT Chancellor. They are FIRM FRIENDS. The idea of any sort of RIFT is SIMPLY NONSENSE got up by the media. In my experience, ORDINARY DECENT PEOPLE are far more interested in listing the GREAT ACHIEVEMENTS of New Labour. In my constituency, people are always coming up to me and saying, "Please pass on our CONGRATULATIONS to the Prime Minister and Chancellor for the WONDERFUL IMPROVEMENTS they've made to all our lives. How lucky we ORDINARY WORKING FOLK are that the two of them are SUCH GOOD FRIENDS."

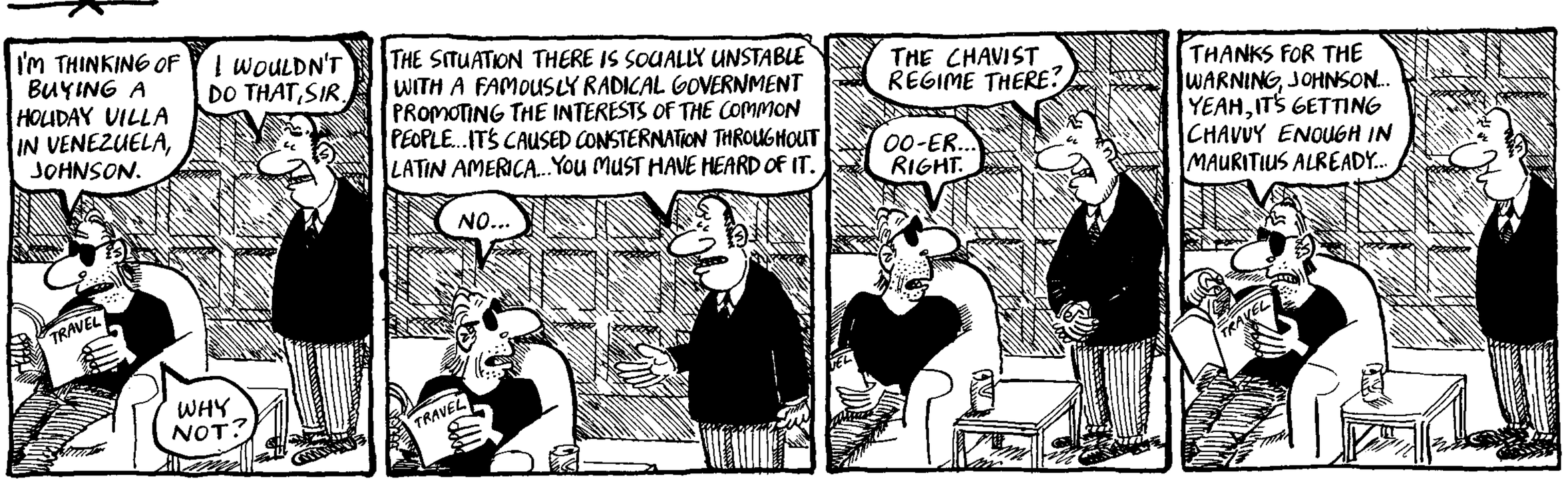
VIVIENNE WESTWOOD: I met Cherie Blair at a party hosted by the Queen last year, and I liked her, she was very interested in what I had to say on the war in Iran. I told her that people get killed in wars, and she was really very interested indeed. I've never actually met Osama bin Laden but I'm sure he can't be as bad as all that, though I've never liked beards. To me he's reminiscent of Marcel Proust du Temps Perdu have you read him? I have. In 1997, it was very exciting. It felt like the world was going to become a better place. But ten years on it's exactly the same place, though I did have an extra bathroom added a couple of months ago, you should see it, it's lovely, very Henry Balzac, have you read him?

JEFFREY ARCHER: Gordon's a very close friend, very close indeed. I'm frankly not prepared to say how close at the present moment. But between ourselves he's assured me that he has the very highest respect for my talents and abilities. Gordon was good enough to credit me with having steered the Conservative Party through three election victories in a row. He's frankly determined to get me "on board" for New Labour when he comes to power.

He's a mate, and I like to help any mate in a fix. So if he wants me to be the Governor of the Bank of England, I'll give it my most urgent consideration. Whether or not I'll be able to combine it with my duties as Chairman of the BBC, it's too early to say. I'll get back to you after consulting with George W. Bush, who's a mate.

BONO: Tony and Gordon are my beloved sons, with whom I am well pleased.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN


I'M THINKING OF BUYING A HOLIDAY VILLA IN VENEZUELA, JOHNSON.
I WOULDN'T DO THAT, SIR.
TRAVEL
WHY NOT?
THE SITUATION THERE IS SOCIALLY UNSTABLE WITH A FAMOUSLY RADICAL GOVERNMENT PROMOTING THE INTERESTS OF THE COMMON PEOPLE... IT'S CAUSED CONSTERNATION THROUGHOUT LATIN AMERICA... YOU MUST HAVE HEARD OF IT.
NO...
TRAVEL
THE CHAVIST REGIME THERE?
OO-ER... RIGHT.
THANKS FOR THE WARNING, JOHNSON... YEAH, IT'S GETTING CHAVVY ENOUGH IN MAURITIUS ALREADY...
TRAVEL

Literary Review

Plum duff

The Debutante Divorcée

Plum Sykes

(Penguin Fig Tree, £12.99)

EVEN the name puts your teeth on edge. Needless to say, it's a nickname. She was christened Victoria, but with that joyous wit for which the British upper classes are renowned across the globe, she has been known as nothing but "Plum" since childhood. It could have been worse: it could have been "Cross", or "Station".

How has Plum Sykes done it? Without any obvious talent, or indeed unobvious talent, this onetime stick-insect model and now stick-insect New York social journalist-cum-butterfly has become a best-selling novelist. Her first book, *Bergdorf Blondes*, sold a quarter of a million copies around the world. To whom? What were they thinking of when they bought it? Have they considered counselling? The social elite of which Plum writes, supposedly satirically, but actually fondly and flatteringly, would account for only a tiny fraction of these sales. The rest must be real people. It's a horrifying thought.

But Plum clearly knows she is on to something and so has written the same book again. The Debutante Divorcées are "New York's young, social, newly unwed girls". The essential gag is that they are barely on their honeymoon before they dump their dull Wall Street husbands and swan off with someone else. How can we blame them? Their lives are just too glamorous and their attention spans too short. "You know how it is in Careyes. You're best friends in five minutes flat because you're both wearing Pucci bikinis." Everywhere there are distractions. "There are so many parties every night it's literally impossible to stay home unless you are the one throwing the party."

Plum's heroine, Sylvie, is unique among these people in that she actually loves her husband, a plank called Hunter who talks like a screaming homosexual, like everyone in the book, because Plum can't do dialogue. If Arnold Schwarzenegger walked into a Plum Sykes novel, he would surely mince and call everyone "Darling!" Or if Plum were in satirical mode, "Darlink!"

So what actually happens? Very little, because Plum spends so much time describing people's clothes and accessories, which constantly change because no one is allowed to wear the same outfit in consecutive scenes. (The thought of it!) In between, her narrator pronounces on what "everyone" is doing. "No one mails anything anymore in New York." Of course not. Today it's carrier pigeon. Tomorrow couriers on penny farthings will be all the rage. You can always spot the fashion journalist who is trying to go legit. Whatever they write about, they cannot break the habit of telling you what "everyone" is doing. Plum has the word fashion imprinted on her DNA. You can sense her trying to take the mick, sometimes trying really hard, gritting her teeth with the effort. But she can't do it. She is the insider's insider, and has the perilously bony back to prove it.

Which may be the secret of her success. She may not be able to tell a story, or create a believable character. But she does know what is fashionable, and her Sylvies and Laurens and Tinsleys live that life, untroubled by the need to make a living or engage in real life in any way at all. This is wealth porn, pure and simple. Want to know what size of monogrammed note card to send to people in New York this year? Plum can tell you. (Two inches by three inches, as it happens.) And if she doesn't know exactly what kind of chandeliers one is buying, you can bet she knows a screaming homosexual who does.

There is another possibility that should not be discounted, that Plum is in truth a hardline Trotskyist dedicated to the overthrow of capitalist society, who has infiltrated it at its highest levels to enrage the proletariat and encourage them to rise up spontaneously and murder the Laurens and Tinsleys and Hunters in cold blood. You never know. One day Plum Sykes may be a heroine of the revolution, whether she realises it or not.

Books & Bookmen

■ HAVING won approval from the Competition Commission to bid for Ottakar's, HMV now seems in two minds about whether it really wants to buy the company.

The original offer was 440p, but the revised and now rejected bid was understood to be between 30 percent and 50 percent below Ottakar's current share price, which is hovering between 300p and 350p. HMV may yet return with a less derisory offer, but it has a limited time in which to do so.

Meanwhile, WH Smug is known to be very interested, the possible wild card of a Tim Waterstone intervention can never be discounted and James Heneage's abortive management buyout may yet prove worthy of revival. The only certainty is a further period of uncertainty.

■ STILL being fairly gentlemanly, publishing looks down on poachers and gazumpers, so the hoo-haa surrounding next year's London Book Fair pleases no one.

This year, the fair moved disastrously from Olympia to London's Docklands. On 4 May, Reed Exhibitions, the LBF organisers, told disgruntled agents that their complaints about the new venue's arctic coldness, migraine-inducing carpet and lengthy queues for all facilities were being addressed.

Then on 5 May, Borsenverein, organiser of the Frankfurt Book Fair, announced that it had booked Earl's Court for an alternative show in April next year, with lower prices. The event had the endorsement of several major publishers, including Hachette Livre's Tim Hely-Hutchinson, who said he wouldn't be going to Docklands again.

Then, just as suddenly, Reed announced that the London Book Fair would move to Earl's Court on the dates that the Frankfurt venture was due to be in residence. Earl's Court Olympia had approved the Frankfurt press release, at no point mentioning that it was negotiating with Reed.

At the time of the move to ExCeL in Docklands, exhibitors were told by Reed that "there was no alternative", there being no central venues available at the right time. Why was Reed so keen on the vile ExCeL anyway? Could it have had anything to do with Reed's 1,946 non-voting shares in London International Exhibition Centre Holdings PLC? And what was behind the sudden return to central London (apart from all the complaints from the book trade about conditions in Docklands)? Could it have anything to do with Ananda Krishnan, the Malaysian billionaire behind ExCeL, now being one of the frontrunners to buy the Earl's Court Olympia group?

The trade has got what it wanted all along – a central London venue and lower prices; but the industry consensus is that Reed has handled the whole matter appallingly, even shabbily. Tut tut!

■ IS THE *Guardian* paying Nicholas Lezard enough for his "paperback of the week" review? Perhaps not, to judge by his behaviour at the Book and Comic Exchange in Notting Hill two weeks ago.

Lezard plonked a pile of paperback review copies on the counter. But when the shop assistant offered him £16 for the lot, he started shoving them back into his rucksack. "I'll take them somewhere else then," he fumed.

The sales assistant was clearly moved by the hack's penury. "Twenty-one quid?" he suggested. Lezard agreed instantly, looking quite ecstatic at the prospect of that all-important extra fiver.

■ JOHN WALSH, the famously libidinous *Independent* columnist, self-publicist and autobiographer, is writing a novel featuring Harold Davidson, aka the Rector of Stiffkey.

Davidson was defrocked in the 1930s for immoral behaviour after spending more time with prostitutes in Soho (preferably "from 14 to 20", he said) than in his Norfolk parish. He then became a fairground attraction, sitting in a barrel in Blackpool.

Walsh plans to have fun at the expense of this "old perve". But he was for once left speechless by the first words of his newly-appointed publicist, who had noted the character of the Rector. "It's you, isnt' it?"

■ AFTER the *Guardian* got in a flap over its columnist Jonathan Freedland's pseudonymous thriller *The Righteous Men* – it first decided not to run a hatchet job on it by Michael Dibdin, then conducted an agonised internal debate about the ethics of in-house reviews – Freedland must be wishing he worked for an organ read by Tories.

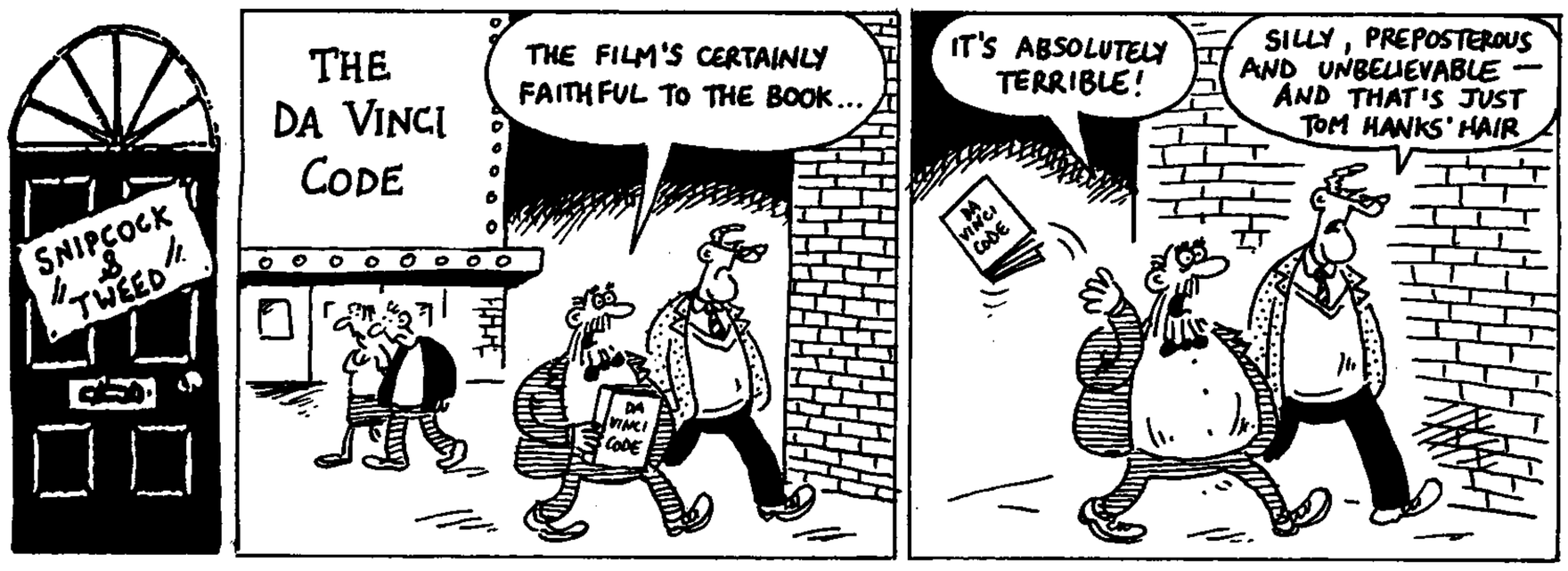
Over at the *Spectator*, there was no ethical queasiness whatsoever about extolling a thriller by Matthew d'Ancona – not merely a columnist, like Freedland at the *Guardian*, but the weekly's editor.

"All credit to d'Ancona," drooled Andrew Taylor in a solus review that will have been happily ticked by the novelist when the proof arrived on his desk for approval.

Mini Number Crunching

■ There were **12** positive reviews of Nicholas Coleridge's *A Much-Married Man* in the British press. **4** appeared in magazines published by Nicholas Coleridge. **3** were written for newspapers by former or current employees of Nicholas Coleridge. **2** were written by personal friends of Nicholas Coleridge. There were **0** negative reviews.

'Bookworm'


SNIPCOCK & TWEED
THE DA VINCI CODE
THE FILM'S CERTAINLY FAITHFUL TO THE BOOK...
DA VINCI CODE
IT'S ABSOLUTELY TERRIBLE!
SILLY, PREPOSTEROUS AND UNBELIEVABLE — AND THAT'S JUST TOM HANKS' HAIR
DA VINCI CODE

Pseuds Corner

Q: I am creating an inscription in every room of my new house and want a long text for the kitchen. I dimly remember a description in a book by Ronald Firbank of the tossing of a salad, which is archly eroticised and ends with the exposure of a single radish, a sort of little death at the end. Can you find it?

ANDREW WILSON LAMBETH
letter to the *Observer's 'Book Doctor'*

Q: What is the most exotic coffee you've ever sipped and where?

A: I once had an espresso in Brazil where the beans had been hand-picked by monkeys on a hard-to-access mountain top.

Coffee Republic founder
BOBBY HASHEMI, *Daily Telegraph*

Tolkien: The Lord of The Mines – Or A Comparative Study Between Mining During the Third Age of Middle-Earth by Dwarves and Mining During Our Age by Men (or Big-People)

DANIELE BARBERIS
article in *Minerals & Energy*

Two important things happened recently. Katie Couric was appointed by CBS as the first solo female anchor of a network evening news show in the USA. In Britain, meanwhile, I stopped watching BBC Television news.

BRYAN APPLEYARD
Sunday Times Magazine

Comedy is a distanciation that spawns possibilities of alterity in the performance of kairos time and a coming of the other in temporality. It is an explication of punctuation as a possibility of transcendence and sociality. Comedy bears testimony to an oblique transcendence where language opens itself to constant bifurcation and the abyss of unstable meaning. It celebrates a split in the human experience of truth, which is intrinsic to the structure of risk in the passion for meaning.

STEPHEN CURKPATRICK
article in *Faith and Freedom: A Journal of Progressive Religion*

For more than one hour I was in vain pursuit of the England striker's soul... Aristotle conjectured that an inability to engage with the abstract is suggestive of inner anxiety. In the case of Owen it is the reverse... When we discuss mortality and existential meaninglessness, he remains as impassive as ever.

MATTHEW SYED interviews footballer Michael Owen, *The Times*

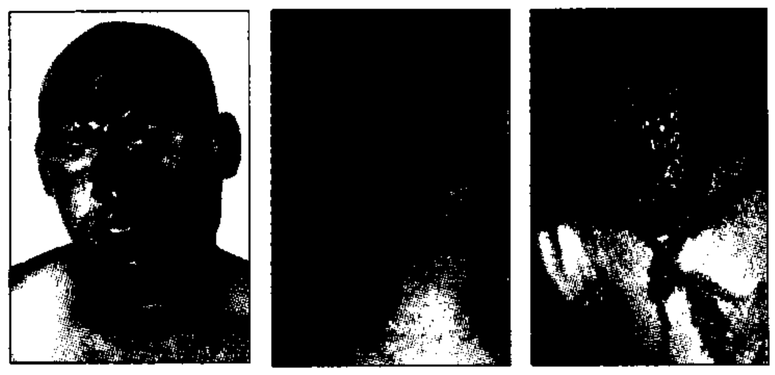
The entire issue of the Independent (16 May 2006) edited by Bono, but particularly the Bono/Izzard interview.

CONTRIBUTORS: Dan Pryce, E.J. Huxley, Gus Grand, Tim Rice, George Chryssides, Strobes, Everyone

IN THE BACK

POLICE 5

What a bloody shower...



JUST about every police officer on duty one night in the Teesside town of Stockton (all 19 of them) are likely to be questioned over an incident in which an innocent man was brutally beaten by some of them and – adding insult to injury – was then charged with assault.

The Independent Police Complaints Commission is supervising an investigation into claims that officers used excessive force against Stephen Whenary (pictured) – after a district judge threw out charges of assault and resisting arrest against Mr Whenary and declared the police case had been "riddled with discrepancies".

Mr Whenary, 36, suffered cuts and bruises to his head, neck and back after he was dragged from a shower and battered with a baton. He was then dragged naked and bleeding from the house and taken to Stockton police station. His injuries, including a huge gash across the back of his neck caused by a baton, required hospital treatment. He was off work for 13 weeks.

The Stockton officers were responding to a call from a neighbour about raised voices coming from the house Mr Whenary sometimes shared with his partner – who just happened to have once been married to a Cleveland policeman. The address was on Cleveland police's "rapid response" list. But that had nothing to do with Mr Whenary: not only had he never been in any kind of trouble with the police before (let alone violence), but he was not even officially resident there. He shared an address with his mother nearby.

Teeside magistrates' court heard that Mr Whenary had been about to leave the house when officers burst in and sprayed him with CS gas. He ran upstairs and locked himself in the bathroom, trying to wash the spray from his face and body. The shower door was smashed off its hinges and Mr Whenary was then beaten.

The police case that Mr Whenary had been resisting arrest with "superhuman strength" and head-butted one officer before assaulting two more started to fall apart as soon as the officers started giving differing accounts of what had happened.

Three officers who attended the house have never been traced; one officer's notebook of events was "destroyed in the wash"; another's statement contradicted the description in her notes that everything was in order outside the house; the officer said to have inflicted the most serious injuries on Mr Whenary went on holiday two days before the trial; and the officers said to have been assaulted by Mr Whenary, including the one said to have been head-butted by him, had barely a mark on them.

The case was dismissed; and as the IPCC now investigates exactly what did happen, one question that needs answering is why the whole station turned out for what was literally a domestic argument – raised voices, no violence. As Mr Whenary's solicitor, Lee Goodchild of Taylor Goodchild, told the Eye: "You don't get that many officers turning up to a murder in our area.

"What happened to Mr Whenary was disgraceful. His injuries were inconsistent with the police account of what happened; the individual police accounts were inconsistent with each other – and we still have not had all the evidence relating to that night disclosed to us."

Mr Whenary's legal team is awaiting the outcome of the IPPC investigation before launching any civil proceedings against the police for damages.

ASBOs

Bananas, anyone?

GEORGE MOTHERSOLE, 79, was born in the shadow of London's historic East Street Market (pictured), and for 45 years it has been his life and livelihood.

First he ran his own fruit and veg stall there; now he works five days a week on his son's stall. Or he did until he became one of the oldest people in Britain to be made the subject of an interim Asbo, or anti-social behaviour order, courtesy of Southwark Council which runs the market.

The Asbo prevents Mr Mothersole from going to the market, attending market traders' meetings or acting "in an intimidating manner" to anyone he knows to be an employee or councillor in Southwark. His crime? As a former vice-president of the Southwark street traders' association, he has long been a vocal critic of the council: sometimes displaying posters on his stall: sometimes heckling at council meetings; and sometimes exchanging choice words with enforcement officers.

The Asbo so angered fellow stallholders and customers, however, that they have joined forces to try to have it lifted. "We believe George has been made the scapegoat for worsening relationship between stallholders and some of the enforcement officers and the council has got the whole thing out of proportion," says John Wallington, secretary of the Southwark Association of Street Traders. "He speaks his mind, but the council and its staff should be able to take that."

The association's own survey blames the use of untrained agency staff for the deteriorating relationship. They have gathered an array of statements from regular market users who testify to Mr Mothersole's "politeness" and "courtesy". "We are behind George 100 percent," says Mr Wallington.

It seems an already strained relationship between stallholders and the council hit an all-time low when Southwark tried to impose a penalty point system for any perceived breaches of market rules.

Among a series of complaints, Southwark council accused Mr Mothersole of racist abuse when he told an enforcement officer to go back to South Africa (Mr Mothersole and his witnesses say the man was a white South African). The council also says he was disruptive at two committee meetings (Mr Mothersole says he was not thrown out and was just voicing his dissent); and that he twice barged into enforcement officers, which he denies. In addition the council claims he followed a councillor home in his car – he says she describes being followed by a yellow car, perhaps a Jaguar; Mr Mothersole drives a white Audi.

"My life is East Street market, and if the Asbo order is confirmed against me, my life would fall apart," says Mr Mothersole. "Because I object to management decisions and also speak my mind at meetings, I am being blamed for the poor relationship between street traders and the council. I think I they have given me an Asbo to shut me up and because I am a non-conformist."

CUSTOMS

Heroin cheek

AS THE government launches its new Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA) to tackle such scourges as drugs and people trafficking, gun running and money laundering, evidence continues to emerge that the organisation providing SOCA with most of its staff, Customs, has been infused with corruption for years.

As officers are handed increasing powers to cut deals with criminals in return for evidence and to force them to answer questions, the prospects for justice look precarious indeed.

The latest embarrassment for Customs comes in the shape of unprecedented "misconduct in public office" convictions for three officers and the emergence of evidence that dodgy operations during the 1990s allowed significant quantities of heroin on to British streets while lining the pockets of suppliers in Pakistan – with taxpayers' cash.

Sheffield crown court heard how Peter Robinson and his Pakistan-based colleague John Barker concealed from their bosses the amounts of heroin they were passing on to dealers as samples during a sting called Operation Serin, aimed at catching the perpetrators of a 35 kilogram importation scam. The idea behind samples is to win the dealers' confidence with small quantities they can use to test the drug's purity. But rather than pass on a few grams, Robinson and Barker were handing over heroin with a street value of hundreds of thousands of pounds. Meanwhile scores of "controlled deliveries" orchestrated from Pakistan involved Customs' informants receiving rewards of £1,000 per kilo, which they often shared with suppliers in what became a highly profitable scam all round.

As with the flawed duty fraud prosecutions explained in the *Eye* before, the roles and scale of the informants' complicity in the smuggling were kept from the courts, leading to a string of collapsed convictions as it emerged that Customs' evidence in court about the origins of controlled deliveries had been false.

But could the whole fiasco be put down to a few corrupt officials? Not according to appeal court judges, who concluded: "There is, in our judgement, substantial evidence which suggests that there was in existence within [Customs] a policy of not disclosing details of the manner in which [controlled deliveries] operated and the role played by participating informants not only to the defence but also to members of HMRC's legal department, prosecuting counsel and of course trial judges".

The saga also throws into question the effectiveness of Customs' efforts against drug smuggling during the 1990s. How many deliveries were instigated by Customs rather than the crooks and might never have happened without official corruption? Or as one of the judges put it: "There are enough dealers in heroin in this country without entrapping more to commit offences". At the very least the credibility of Customs' seizure figures over years is thrown into doubt.

The courts also heard how, despite having been presented by the police in 2000 with clear evidence of the officers' corruption, Customs failed to launch any sort of investigation on the grounds that "it was unlikely that any person was not safely convicted". One appeal court judge's withering assessment of that was simply: "We are at a loss to understand how anyone could have reached that view."

Meanwhile the convicted Customs officers escaped with three- and six-month suspended sentences, a degree of leniency eloquently summed up by one ex-con: "If I was convicted of putting 2 kilos of heroin onto the streets I'd be looking at 10 years."

ACCOUNTANCY

China syndrome

RED faces at accountancy giant Ernst & Young, which last week was forced to withdraw a report declaring $358bn of bad debts at China's state-owned banks, having noticed that accounts for one of them, which didn't disclose the problem, had been given a clean audit certificate by... Ernst & Young.

Of course the report was at fault, not the audits. The report did not, in the firm's words, "go through our normal internal review and approval process before it was released to the public".Only a cynic would suggest that bosses panicked as they realised they had posed serious questions about China's financial system; a move unlikely to win many friends in the sensitive Beijing government – and none too clever coming soon after the firm had doubled its presence in the country to take advantage of the booming economy. E&Y's press release announcing the about-turn provided the helpful reassurance that the firm "is committed to restoring the public's trust in professional services firms and in the quality of financial reporting". Hm.

Number crunching

32% ■ Amount rainfall is down on average in Thames Water region

32% ■ Amount of water Thames Water loses through leaks

92% ■ Amount of salary Thames Water directors received as a bonus in 2004/5

NUCLEAER ENERGY

No doubting Thomas

DIPESH SHAH, chief executive of the Atomic Energy Authority (AEA), got most of the credit for recent suggestions of a City-backed management buyout (MBO) of the government-owned nuclear group. But it's not hard to see the hand of AEA chairman Barbara Thomas (pictured) at work as well, given her extensive involvement in the investment business.

The AEA is supposed to keep a register of interests that records its board members' other jobs. But it admitted the register was "seriously out of date". After prompting by the *Eye*, it updated the list to include some of the chairman's many jobs, including her involvement in two investment companies, Private Equity Investor plc and the Second London American Trust. But even after reminders it would not add some of her other firms to the register.

Cross Border Enterprises, for example, a New York-based investment bank, confirmed that Thomas is one of its advisers; yet it still does not appear on the AEA list. Nor does Dynamic Solutions Venture Capital Group, an investment company chaired by Thomas's husband, Sir Paul Judge, where according to Companies House she has a board position.

Thomas's involvement in the financial sector will make her warm to Shah's proposed privatisation by MBO. Or an existing firm like AMEC could take over part of the AEA. Either way, top managers would be handsomely rewarded. But the benefits to the public are much harder to see.

The AEA manages nuclear sites like the Dounreay complex in Scotland. It could also become involved in decommissioning other sites around Britain. Decommissioning the nuclear "legacy" of the AEA, BNFL and other atomic waste is important in itself and should perhaps be properly managed before any new nuclear power stations are commissioned. However, nuclear industry managers risk tying themselves in knots over a complex set of buyouts, privatisations and sell-offs rather than focusing on dealing with that waste.

Current plans for the AEA already include dividing it into three "entities" – one to do "site management" at places like Dounreay, another to run fusion research and a third, according to Industry Minister Jim Fitzpatrick, to be a commercial "Newco". Add MBOs, commercial takeovers and privatisations to the mix and there is a recipe for deep confusion. As the Dounreay representative of the Prospect Union recently warned his conference: "Senior management and staff will be distracted by the need to win their next contract and the risk of safety breaches will increase greatly."

Dipesh Shah's plans for an MBO may come to nothing because the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority, which has authority over the AEA, is not that impressed with him or Barbara Thomas, not least because they have already overseen one serious safety breach. Last September there was a major spill at Dounreay when an operator tried to pour radioactive liquid into a closed drum. This earned the AEA a warning and to have £1m in fees withheld by the NDA, throwing all plans into question.

Dounreay staff who fear their managers might become distracted by privatisation plans should realise their chairman Barbara Thomas already has more than a dozen jobs – including a place on the board of a Staffordshire pottery-maker and a role helping sell Richard Branson's jewellery!

Big BNG theory?

EDUCATION chiefs are considering siting one of the government's 200 flagship academy schools in West Cumbria. And the first private sponsor believed to have promised to pledge an initial £2m? The area's biggest employer, the British Nuclear Group (BNG).

As the *Eye* reported last month, the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA) has already put £5m towards Nucleus, part of the proposed National Nuclear Skills Academy in West Cumbria, in partnership with Lakes College and the University of Central Lancashire. Now there is strong speculation that BNG is buying its way into education as well.

A £30m academy to replace two schools at Cleator Moor and Egremont is one of three options being explored by Cumbria education chiefs. Local Labour MP Jamie Reed said the government was backing the academy scheme and that he had already been pledged £2m from an unnamed sponsor. While BNG has not confirmed that it is the sponsor, no other company in the area has the money or such close links to the Copeland MP, who regularly speaks on its behalf in the local newspaper.

Nuclear chiefs have already been accused of buying local influence and placating dissenters by diverting funds meant for disposing of nuclear waste into local cash-strapped hospitals. The Nuclear Decommissioning Authority has promised £18m to the local debt-ridden health trust as part of its commitment to "a strong and sustainable community". That triggered complaints that money which should be spent on nuclear safety was being diverted to bail out the NHS.

NHS FUNDING

Trowbridge, wilts

THE worst thing that can happen to a hospital, it seems, is to be praised by Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt and the prime minister. That is certainly the lesson from Trowbridge in Wiltshire.

Back in January she issued her latest white paper on the NHS, called *Our health, Our care, Our say*, which promised to put more focus on primary care, prevention and bringing healthcare closer to patients. Tony Blair was so shocked by the cynical reaction to the paper he held special press briefings with health correspondents to emphasise his support for Hewitt's plans.

All this looked like jolly good news for Trowbridge Hospital (pictured), which was one of two hospitals singled out as examples of "best practice" in the paper, which carried an introduction by the prime minister himself. According to the paper, Trowbridge has an outstanding "project to improve patient planning discharge" where proper planning, social work and preparation means "length of stay and readmission rates have fallen" and "the number of local authority-funded placements has significantly reduced". In short, the hospital has found a cure for bed blocking.

However, just five days before singling Trowbridge out for national praise, Hewitt sent a "turnaround team" to sort out the financial disaster that is the West Wiltshire Primary Care Trust. The trust has now decided to "turn around" its finances by following one of three options – each of which involves the closure of Trowbridge Hospital.

OXFORDSHIRE CUTS

To Capio it all

MAJOR hospitals in Oxfordshire are likely to have to mothball beds and lay off staff to curb debts of more than £32m.

The Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals NHS Trust is one of many around the country facing severe cut backs thanks to PFI service repayments, unforeseen salary increases and a raft of unprecedented NHS reforms aimed at turning the health service into a private market.

In Oxfordshire, the local newspaper the *Banbury Cake* has reported how the county's own health watchdog was warned that the cuts would be "painful", with staff at Banbury's Horton General (pictured) saying they were fearful for their jobs and that beds were to be cut.

A similar picture emerges at the Churchill hospital and at the John Radcliffe, Oxfordshire's largest hospital. At the latter, a doctor was reported as saying that any bed cuts would render the hospital "unviable".

Funnily enough the very same issue of the Banbury newspaper carried a large recruitment advertisement for staff at a new privately run Capio-NHS treatment centre... being built on the Horton Hospital site! "In May 2004, Capio signed the largest public sector care contract ever awarded to a private sector healthcare provider in the UK. Under this contract 95,000 NHS patients are being treated by Capio between 2005-10..."

Any nurses, health care assistants or support staff being laid off by the impoverished NHS can always apply to the featherbedded Capio Group for work.

JOINED-UP HEALTHCARE

We need to talk

A NETWORK of 250 "talking therapy" centres is the current wheeze being promoted by Lord Richard Layard (pictured), the government's adviser on mental health, to reduce the amount of anti-depressants and other drugs being dished out to people who could get more benefit from counselling.

There's no doubt that talking therapy saves the government money – and not only on prescriptions. Patients who get counselling are more likely to get well and get back to work and are less likely to be expensively hospitalised than those who are just medicated and sent home.

In most of the country, waiting lists to be referred to a therapist are huge; but people suffering from depression or anxiety in Cheshunt and Waltham Cross have had access to an excellent NHS counselling service since 1999, funded by local GPs who have pooled their discretionary budgets to hire a team of therapists. However, with the arrival of practice-based commissioning (part of the whole NHS Agenda for Change malarkey) the GPs no longer have discretionary budgets to fund the service.

A consultation by South East Hertforshire Primary Care Trust on the future of the service, which takes on 600 patients a year, was held in April, but the options didn't look promising: cut other local services, find more GPs to share the cost via practice-based commissioning (approaches to GPs in neighbouring areas were unsuccessful), drop the service altogether or come up with a more "cost-effective" (cheaper) service.

A subsequent meeting of GPs, counsellors, local voluntary organisations and the PCT concluded that "in view of the financial situation, the current service was not sustainable". Patients on the waiting list for therapy are to be referred back to their GPs and the trust is trying to develop new proposals for future provision of counselling but "funding remains a critical factor".

Meanwhile the Department for Health is set to launch two demonstration sites to test out Lord Layard's fantastic new talking therapy idea. Hurrah for joined up government!

BT & IT

Crossed lines

JUST weeks before the National Audit Office (NAO) reports on the NHS's monumental National Programme for IT (NPfIT), Richard Granger, boss of the body struggling to keep it on the rails, Connecting for Health (CfH), has received some timely support from an unlikely quarter.

While other companies working on the project announce losses and share price collapses (see *Eyes passim*), the firm responsible for much of the central infrastructure and installing systems across London, BT, claims everything is just tickety-boo.

"Some [other suppliers] have told their shareholders that they have difficulties. You have not heard us say that so far, and I don't think you will. We are in good shape," chief executive Ben Verwaayen told the *Sunday Times*.

Oh yeah? It's a far cry from last October when BT admitted to being a year behind schedule on much of its work. And now official CfH figures just released show that the reality remains somewhat different to the picture Verwaayen paints. BT has only put in part of one of the acute hospital patient record systems that are the most important element of the programme – against a target for March 2006 of more than 30. Even allowing for installations of smaller products in primary care trusts, the firm's income as "local service supplier" for London is so far likely to be minimal as suppliers are only supposed to get paid when they deliver. All the while BT has been employing hundreds of IT specialists for two and a half years, racking up costs likely to exceed £100m – much more than the company could possibly have been paid for the little it has produced so far.

BT's progress is in fact worse than that of Accenture which, as *Eye* 1157 reported, has already admitted losing £260m on the NHS NPfIT. As local service provider in the east and north east, Accenture has deployed 730 IT systems across those two regions compared to BT's 64 in one. So are BT's rosy claims believable, or is the firm, like software company ISoft, reporting vast earnings before it has received the cash?

Last week the company announced profits of £2.18bn, up 5 percent on last year -- growth that saw its shares immediately leap 8 percent but which would have been blown apart if losses had been reported on the NHS work. So the *Eye* asked BT: how much it had received from the NPfIT, whether (as with iSoft) this differed from the income reported in its accounts; and what its costs so far were. In the best tradition of deals shelling out billions of taxpayers' money, however, the company's contract with the NHS bans any such disclosure.

What little BT's accounts do have to say about its performance as supplier for London is to boast of the one hospital in which it has delivered anything, Queen Mary Sidcup. They somewhat misleadingly overlook the 30 on which it is years behind schedule – delays that give the lie to the company's claim that "BT continues to build on its successes with its contracts for the NHS NPfIT".

Some in the industry suspect that Granger needs all the support he can get ahead of the NAO report and a public accounts committee hearing next month. Relying on the CfH boss to sign its cheques, BT may well have decided the best policy was to get on the right side of him and please the City at the same time.

FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS...

■ **TELSCOMBE TYE:** Not content with ruining the outstanding natural beauty of this bit of the Sussex downs with a half-mile wall of unsightly rubble and chalk "bunding" (see *Eyes passim*), "conservationists" are now intent on fencing off large bits of it.

Until local residents and, among others, the Open Spaces Society complained, the powers that be had allowed ugly electric fencing on parts of the downs to separate two herds of cattle. Much of the fencing has now had to come down pending a public inquiry; but applications have now been made to permanently fence off the area to the north which enjoys the best views. Adding insult to injury, the unsightly bunds – which contained traditional material such as, er, asbestos, wire and rubble, and which were ordered to be removed last year – are still there. It seems it will take an enforcement notice from the local authority before the South Downs Conservation Board and the contractor who dumped the rubble remove the eyesore.

Locals aren't holding their breath, however. They fully expect a new application for reduced bunding or more fencing as an alternative. "This is more about intensive grazing, not protection or conservation," said one. So much for natural beauty.

In the City

FULHAM managed a small improvement in their Premiership fortunes – one place higher at 12 out of 20 – in the season just ended, but the finances of the phoney pharaoh Mohamed Fayed's club now seem to depend less on the Fayed offshore cheque book and ultimately perhaps more on the money coming through the tills at Harrods.

Since 2002 Harrods (UK), the immediate parent company of the Knightsbridge store, has been providing "payroll services and payroll costs" which are then recharged to the soccer club. In other words, it would seem that Harrods (UK) rather than Fulham FC has been paying the wages of the Fulham squad.

For the 2004-5 season these totaled just over £33m. And the latest accounts for the club reveal that during that year Harrods (UK) recharged the club £32.5m of this amount. From virtually nothing in 2001, the amounts owed to Harrods (UK) have grown from £12m in 2002 to almost £25m in June 2005 and no less than £36,616,461.28 by last November, some three months into the 2005-6 season.

Perhaps not surprisingly (given that Fulham FC had net liabilities of £119m, mostly owed to its parent Fulham Football Leisure, which in turn owed £114m to its Fayed-controlled offshore parent company in the British Virgin Islands), this debt has been converted into a loan largely secured on the club's revamped Craven Cottage stadium. On 25 November the £36.6m was converted into a loan from Harrods (UK).

The new loan agreement is revealed in the latest Fulham FC accounts for the year to June 2005. They had been signed off only on 27 April.

Curiously there was no mention of this agreement in the accounts for the Harrods company, which were signed off on 28 November. These accounts were for a trading period which ended almost 10 months earlier and were completed just days before the legal deadline. On average, FT100 companies file their accounts within six months of their year-end. Naturally the loan agreement will feature in the 2006 Harrods (UK) accounts.

Doubtless the loan agreement was made fully known to the Harrods auditor Grant Thornton which does not audit Fulham. Its auditor is PKF.

However, the Harrods (UK) accounts did show that whereas during year to January 2005 the company had recharged payroll and administration charges to Fulham FC of £32.6m, little different from the previous year, the amount outstanding at January 2005 was £16m against zero in 2004. By June 2005 that figure was almost £25m and this had grown to £36.6m by November 2005.

Another question raised by this generous loan from another pocket in the pharaoh's well-cut suit is how Harrods (UK) finances such largesse. Its main income is from the dividend paid up from the store – £39m last time. And all of that and more – £51m – was in turn paid onwards and upwards to Harrods Holdings, the ultimate parent from which the Fayed family received a dividend of £39m. The answer would seem to be the financing that Harrods (UK) receives from other group companies for which the store is the main money generator providing almost the entire group revenues of £450m last time.

It is no doubt unconnected that within days of the loan agreement being signed with Harrods (UK), Fulham FC declared it had fully paid off two earlier secured loan facilities provided by GE Capital Commercial Finance and Registered European Football Finance, the Guernsey company which had provided financial leasing assistance for player transfers. Both had charges over the club's assets.

Exactly how or when Fulham FC will repay the Harrods loan (absent a sale by Fayed of the club) is unclear. Both Harrods Holdings and Harrods (UK) already had charges over Craven Cottage. This cost £22m, but has a net book value of just £14m in the latest accounts for Fulham Stadium.

It is no doubt both coincidental and irrelevant that at the time the loan agreement was signed, Fayed was the only director of Fulham Stadium, which like the club is a subsidiary of Fulham Football Leisure. Two other directors had resigned two days earlier but remained directors of the club and its parent and a third, who also resigned from the club, had left in October.

Like the executive roundabout at the store, the Fulham FC boardroom is also in regular motion. Thirteen directors have resigned since 2000. These include former manager Jean Tigana, who, it seems, is most probably the former director who received a £2.6m payout during the year to June 2005 after the lengthy legal row that followed his sacking in 2003. Fayed lost an appeal against a compensation ruling in favour of Tigana in July last year.

The current board comprises Fayed and his two sons, Karim, aged 22, and Omar, aged 18. They joined in February 2005. Following the resignation of Andrew Ambler and Charles Hoos in March, there are now four other Fulham FC directors, including longtime Fayed apparatchik Stuart Benson and Mark Collins.

Fulham had revenues last year of £38.5m, little more than the wage bill, but operating expenses of £52.3m resulting in a loss of £12.3m (exceeded only by Manchester City and of course Chelsea). Accumulated losses now total almost £120m.

Furthermore, in addition to the £36m-plus owed to Harrods (UK) there is the not so little matter of the £100m-plus owed by Fulham Football Leisure to Fulham Leisure Holdings in the BVI, ie Fayed and family. The BVI company has so far loaned £100m interest free of which £45m is secured and due to be repaid no earlier than March 2008, the balance is unsecured and due in May 2017. Another £14m was due on demand as at June last year. Quite a repayment schedule for a company losing millions!

Of course it can and should be stated that as Fayed controls all the Harrods and Fulham companies, the loan and recharging is merely an internal matter within the same private business empire. But it still suggests that much of what is going on amounts to moving money around a sizeably borrowed group to bolster a loss-making hobby at a time when the Harrods money machine shows little sign of anything approaching dynamic growth.

These arrangements doubtless will be of no concern to Fayed's bankers but may well interest his old friends at the Inland Revenue, especially as we are now told that he has abandoned his brief tax exile in Switzerland and is once again "resident in the UK". Fayed says he has "made an arrangement with the Revenue". Presumably to pay tax on the income, capital and benefits actually received in the UK as he has "non-domicile" status rather than the beneficial fixed amount a year deal cancelled by the taxman which provoked Fayed's move abroad.

The zillions poured into Fulham contrast with the amounts offered to bail out the Harrods

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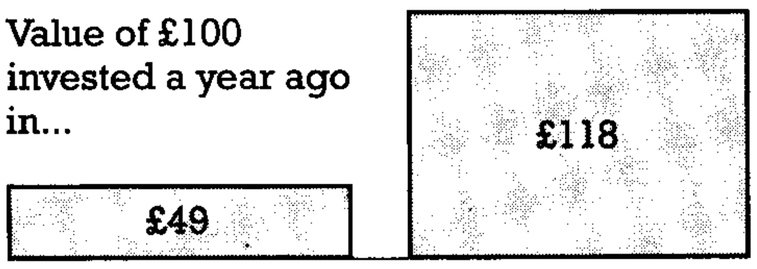
210.

Stock Horror

by 'Bruin'

Xbox Magazine publisher Future – chaired by City bigwig Roger Parry – zaps its shareholders

Value of £100 invested a year ago in...



...**Future** plc ...the rest of the stock market

pension fund. The store's final salary scheme has been closed to both new and existing employees. The fund has a deficit estimated in February at £111m. Harrods intends to pay in £90m over the next ten years. Somewhat less than the £211m the Fayed family have received in dividends from Harrods Holdings since 2001.

UNLIKE the hapless Mr Justice Tomlinson in the BCCI trial fiasco, Judge Sim Lake in the Enron trial in Houston has continued taking no nonsense from lawyers.

Clearly irritated that the trial, which started on 30 January, was going to run into May and was a week behind schedule when former chairman Ken Lay began giving evidence last month, Lake told his counsel to "move along" when interrupting twice on the second day of Lay's evidence. "I'm not going to have you sparring over minor uncontroverted issues," the judge declared during subsequent expert accounting evidence presented by the defence. No British judge in a major trial would take such action for fear of the inevitable appeal.

The case went to the jury last week after hearing evidence (from 54 witnesses) and argument for just 56 days including just one day for opening and three days for closing arguments. The judge gave his instructions on the relevant law covering the 28 charges in a matter of hours.

Compare that with the 256 days of the civil case brought against the Bank of England by the BCCI liquidators. That lasted almost two years before it collapsed, during which there were just two witnesses and counsel were allowed to address Tomlinson for a staggering 205 days.

No wonder Lay's chief lawyer Michael Ramsey, hospitalized during the trial with heart problems, declared that he was looking to ply his advocacy overseas, possibly at the Hague war crimes tribunal. "They try cases in a much more civilized fashion over there." Perhaps he also had BCCI in mind?

The verdict in the fraud trial of the two major Enron players – Lay and former chief executive Jeffrey Skilling – is expected in the near future.

Meanwhile Judge Lake has already started a second trial in which Lay is the only defendant charged with bank fraud. There is no jury in that case. As can be seen, US federal judges do not hang around.

Judge Lake also showed a concern for the jurors rarely shared by British judges. After they had been sitting for 30 days the, judge awarded them a 25% pay rise from $40 to $50 (£27) a day. The jurors sit just four days a week Monday to Thursday.

An equivalent SFO prosecution to Enron would probably take many months more. Perhaps when looking at the burgeoning legal aid bill which fuels so much of the long trial problem in the UK the government, in addition to planning to get rid of juries, should consider getting rid of judges who allow the fraud gravy trains to run so far and so long.

'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 314

by Cyclops

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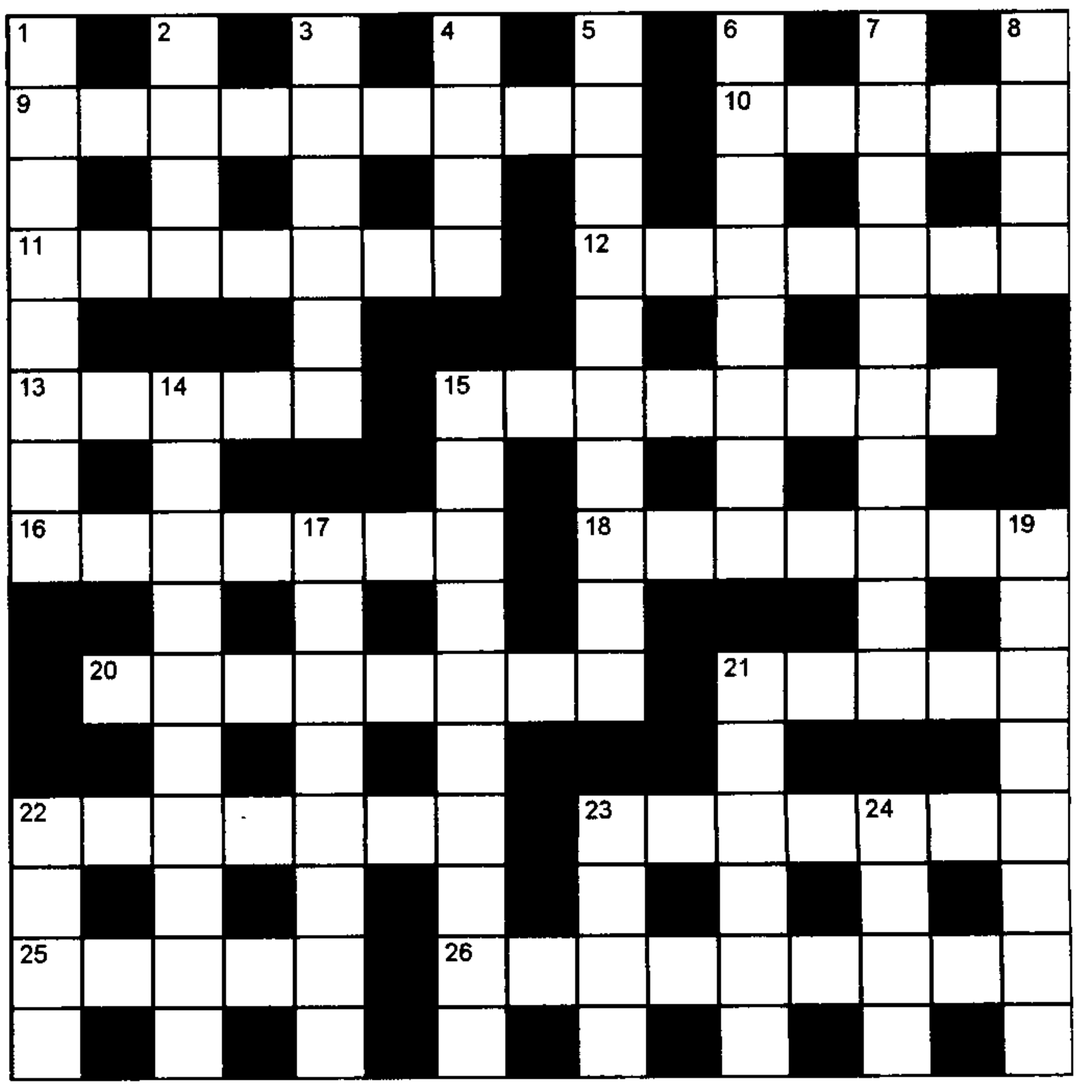

ACROSS

9 Blair's political position as determined by focus groups? (3,6)
10/3 By whom a man gets hardened to the frustration of non-consummation (5,6)
11 Cyclops has had his day in a blind alley (7)
12 Apt description of end of willie (mine) with article stuck in it (7)
13/15ac. Blair-Brown thing that could bring about a split? Might to Labour (5,8)
16 Jagger finally set to change – a museum piece now, this Stone (7)
18 Soldier who's dropped dog's butt on model (7)
20 Girl star having sex by yard – it leads to rupture (8)
21 See 2dn.
22 VIP celebrity robber not good and randy (3,4)
23 Mock serious stiff one when embracing Penny (7)
25 Member's area: enter to accept Blair's end (5)
26 Agreeable schedule that keeps Brenda and co. going (5,4)

DOWN

1 Fanny makes only a fleeting final appearance in her act? (8)
2/21ac. Don't speak of supports applied to hot belly (4,5)
3 See 10ac.
4 Observer's irritated by this middling piece from busty Eve (4)
5 Rapidly depressing key activity – a bit like a Tory rag? (10)
6 Well, Brenda's a rubbish TV host (8)
7 Sir's top removed by gay – reassuring for those who go fearfully to bed? (5-5)
8 "Go down sportingly" tip from Prescott, just a hoax (4)
14 Ex-president's not getting an erection after cleaning up act (10)
15 Figures some Tory leaders are implicated in something shocking to a point (10)
17 Pitiful groping? (8)
19 Tone: "Am in trouble – put somebody up for election" (8)
21 Undercover items? The last things we'd print (6)
22 It's good to wallow in flipping blubber, gentlemen ...! (4)
23 ... like a pig stuck up prima donna (4)
24 Killjoy Prince dominating Diana endlessly (4)

Crossword 313 winner: MARK NICHOLS

ACROSS: 9 Clinton 10 Colonel 11 Alkie 12 Beer belly 13/18/24 Leader of the free world 14 Viagra 16 Stealth 19 In-tray 21 Impotent 26 Corps 27/15 Natural gas 28 Capital.

DOWN: 1 Scrawl 2 Kicks ass 3 Athene 4 Knob joke 5 GCSE 6 Slobbish 7 Analog 8 Playmate 15 Griffons 16 Star Wars 17 Limp-dick 18 The trots 20 Treaty 22 Occupy 23 Tussle 25 Rolf.

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Er.. yeah

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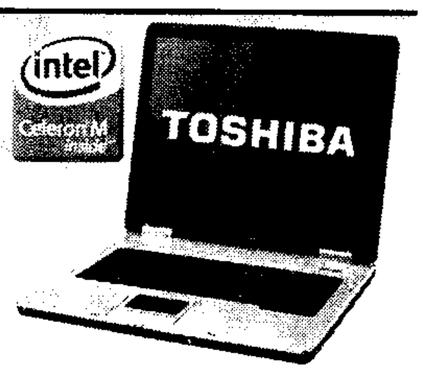

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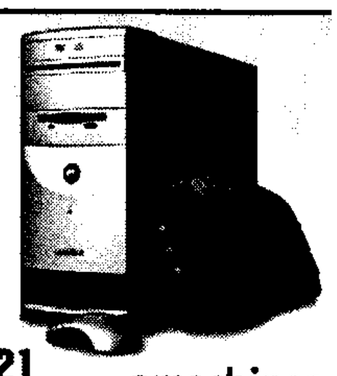

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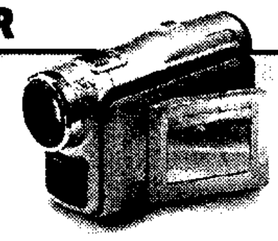

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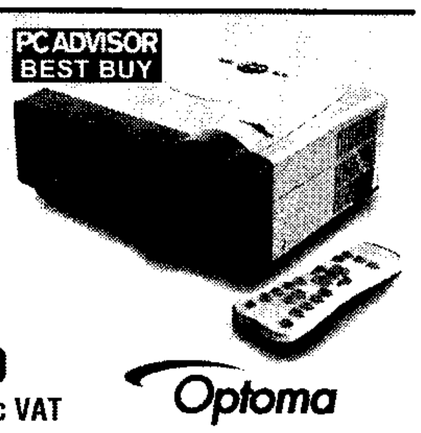

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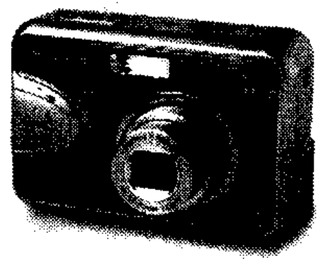

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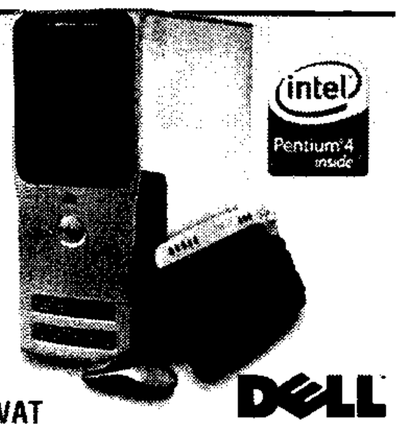

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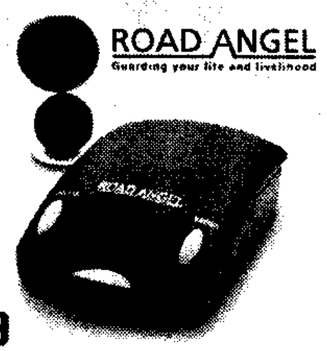

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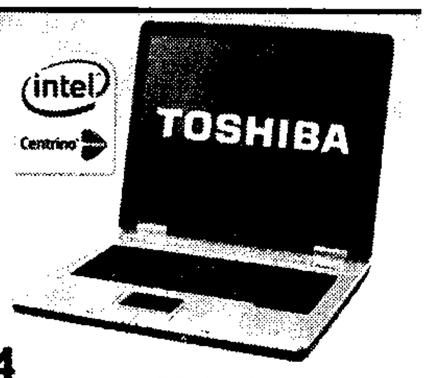

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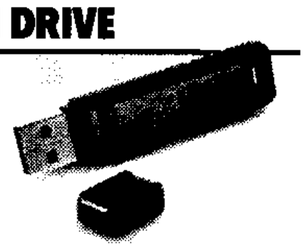

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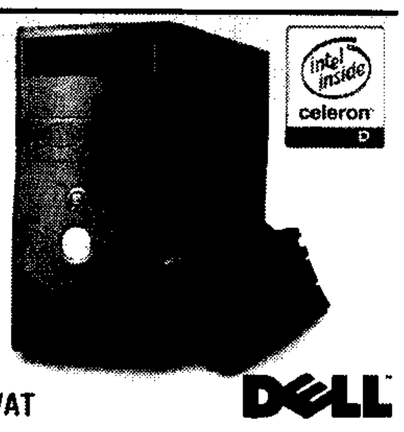

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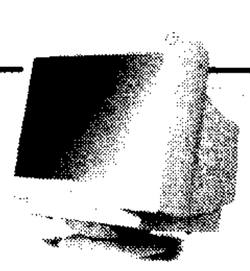

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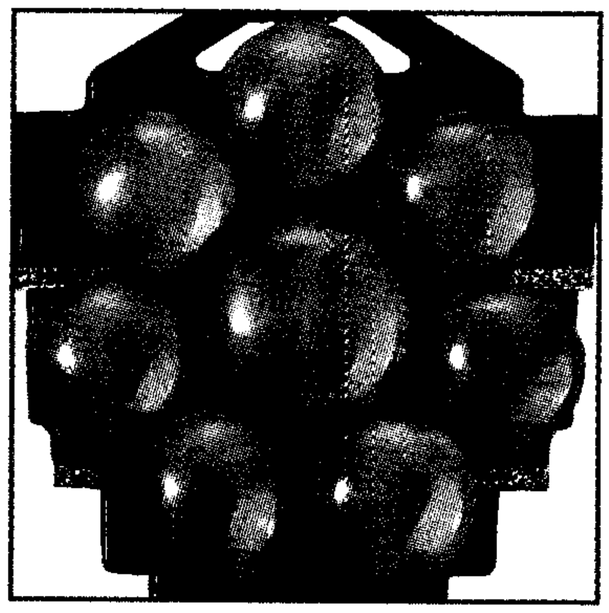

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OM SAI RAM

A fitting end to the ill-fitting British suit

A suitable man to spark a men's clothing revolution

Consider this proposition. Would you rather pay the same sum for a single, off-the-peg, chain store suit cut by a computer and sold to you by a spotty boy who thinks side vents are to be found on a Lambretta scooter, or for two bespoke, custom cut, hand-stitched suits, measured and sold to you by a man for whom suits are a lifetime's passion?

The British clothing chain store has a lot to fear from ***Mr. Raja M Daswani*** of Kowloon. If there were a global ambassador for men's suiting, Mr Daswani, who owns and runs Hong Kong's biggest tailoring business, would be that man. He and his family team measure and make hundreds of suits a week for discerning clients across the world.

Indeed, so successful is ***Mr. Daswani***, that - a little unnervingly as he is measuring you up - he freely admits he doesn't really need to work any more: 'My team is as experienced as I am. But I just love men's suits and I wouldn't feel right sitting at home. It's not a business. It's a mission.

'I love seeing customers walk in a really bad suit that cost them a fortune and walk out in one of our suits that's perfect in every way, made with a good heart in a superior fabric for a half or a quarter as much.'

The price of a Daswani shirt and suit are astonishing. We are talking from £19 (£25 including tax and duty) for a custom shirt and £129 (£169 including tax and duty) for a fully lined, made-to measure suit in a lightweight wool or linen, to £250 (£325 including tax and duty) for a 100 per cent wool, entirely hand finished suit in a British cloth, with every refinement from handmade button holes to knee lining. Even the most expensive suit, made in deluxe superfine wool for £1,500 (£1,950 including tax and duty), costs a third less than it would on **Savile Row**.

Raja Daswani may be based in Hong Kong, but his sartorial mission to the badly dressed and overpaying British customer brings him to the UK as often as once a month. He and his team take over hotel suites in major cities, so British customers can make an appointment and get the full Kowloon Monty.

Measurements and digital photos are taken here and emailed to Hong Kong. Often, your suit will be started on by a tailor 6,000 miles away before you've even left the hotel. You can have it couriered within a week or so, or wait for a second fitting when the Raja team hits your town again a few weeks later.

It now remains to see whether the Raja revolution, with its inspired mix of artistic flair, entrepreneurial genius and digital technology, will see the end of the off-the-peg British chain store suit. On price alone, it's a sartorial solution that will even please the Suits in accounts.

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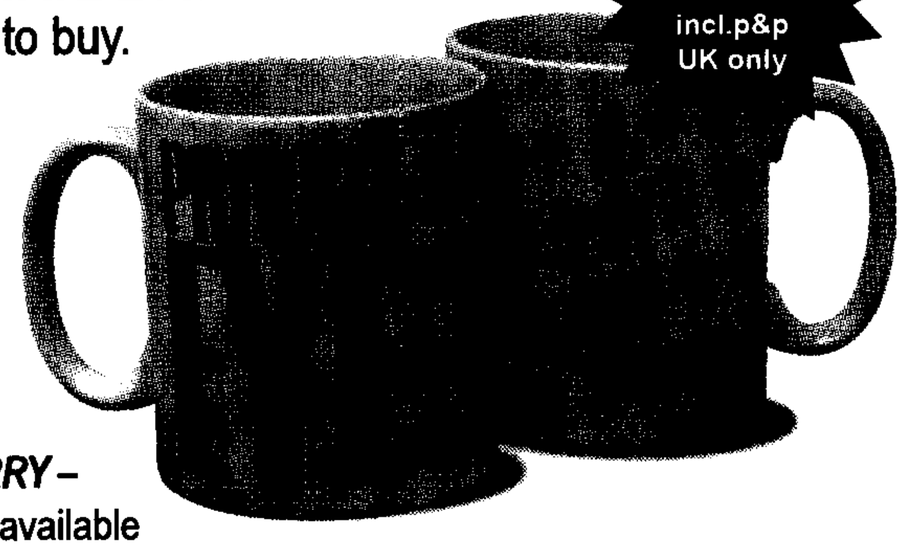

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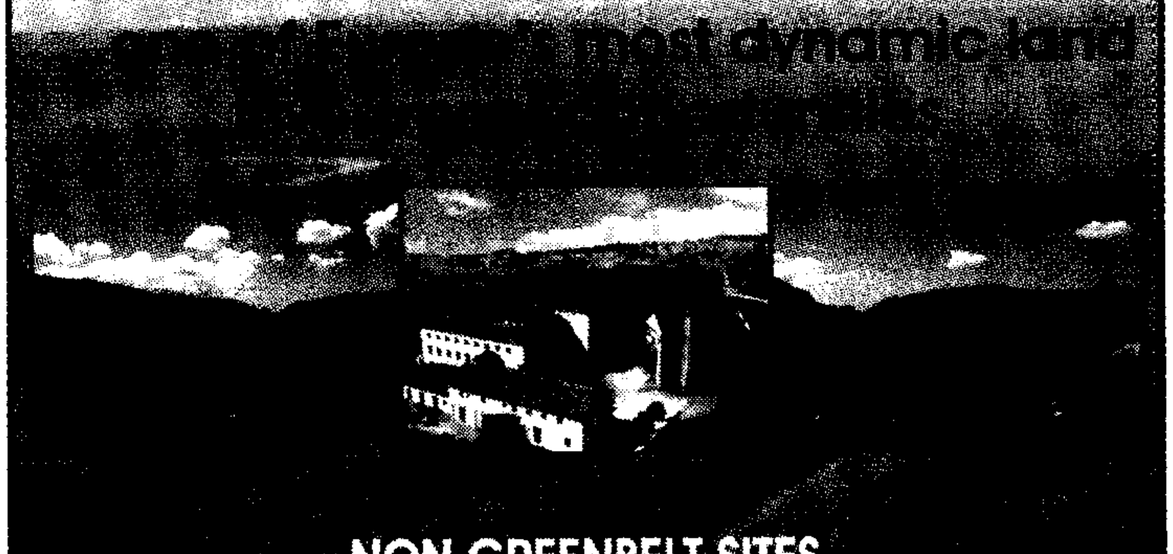

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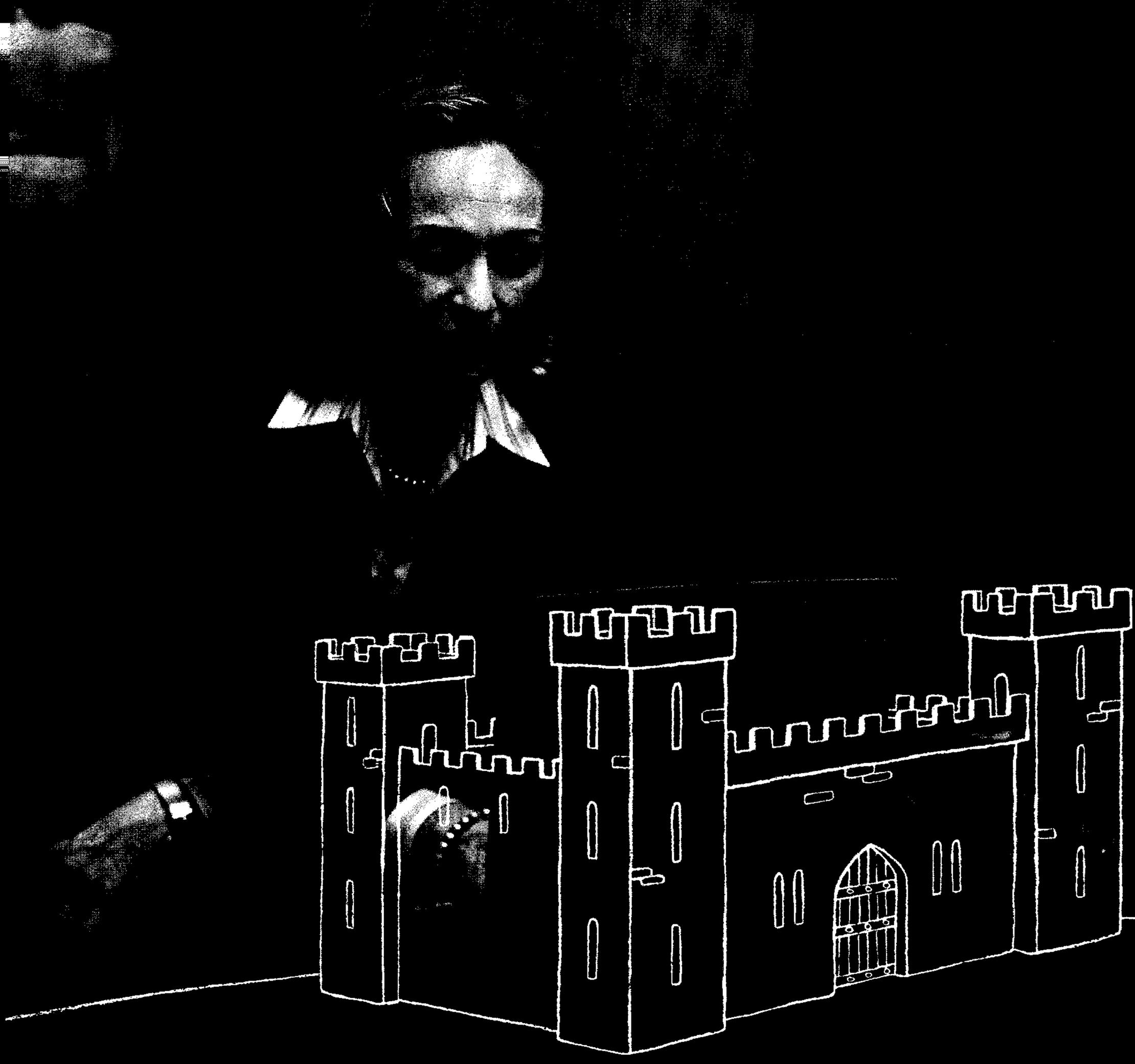

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